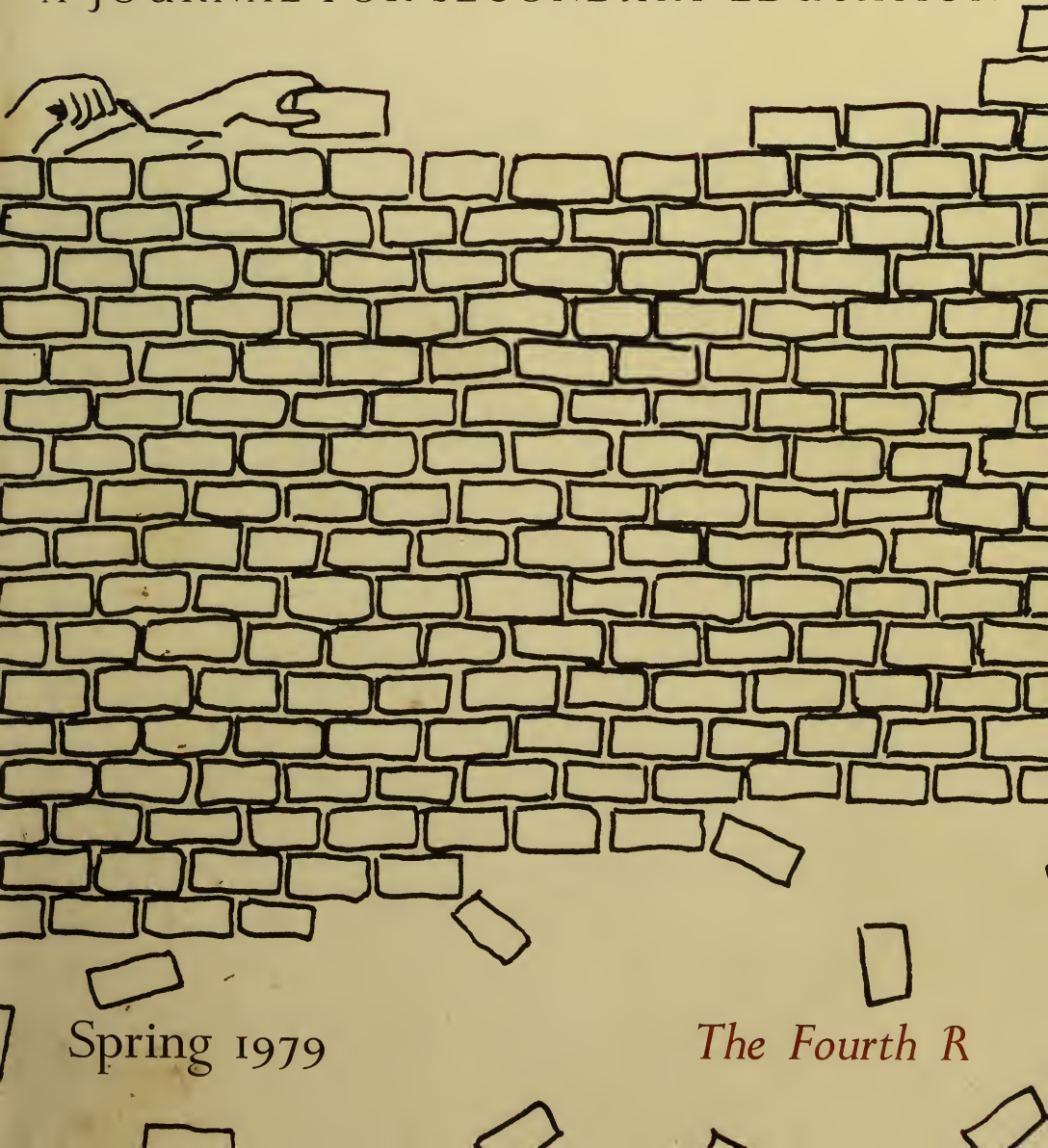


# The Andover Review

A JOURNAL FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION



Spring 1979

*The Fourth R*

INPUTTING TOGETHER the articles for this issue, we have been concerned with the strong impulse in the country to return to basics in the face of declining achievement and aptitude scores throughout the schools. We have also wanted to take a look at the role of creativity, of the arts, in an education which concentrates on reading, writing and mathematical computation. We have put into the air still a third ball: the issue of test measurement. We suspect that what is measurable is not worth testing and that what we really ought to be teaching is essentially beyond measurement. Miraculously we have been able to keep all three balls in the air. It is not our intention to decry the basics; they are, after all, basic, fundamental to secondary education. But basic to what? To finding a place and a mode to operate in in our complex and disturbing times. To exercising the imagination, the will, the sense of individuality within society which makes finding that place possible. We are indebted to Joseph Featherstone, who proposed the concept of the Fourth R in his book *What Schools Can Do*, for the title that holds all this together.

We note with great sadness the passing of Robert L. Dothard, publisher and designer. An old friend, he got us off the ground in our first issue. Subsequent issues bear the imprint of his skill and critical eye.

*The Editor*

THE REVIEW invites articles, poetry and graphics from all quarters and will select material with concern for secondary education. If mailed, graphic work should be insured by the sender. It will be returned in due course in the same manner.

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# Psychological and Cultural Sources of Children's Thinking

*The Nets with which We Fish*

ELLIOT W. EISNER

Twenty-three centuries ago Aristotle remarked, "Man, by nature, seeks to know." His observation about human nature provides the focus for this paper, the psychological and cultural sources of children's thinking, the factors that influence what they can come to know.

Humans enter the world with a variety of psychological capacities. We greet the world with the capacity to see, to hear, to taste, to smell, to touch, to experience movement, temperature and the like. Although the sensory systems are not well defined at birth, it is not too long before they begin to develop, to become more refined, and to become increasingly useful for picking up the qualitative cues that constitute the environment in which the newborn lives. What initiates as capacity gradually develops into ability. What is potential becomes actual. The study of these capacities and the ways in which they change over time has been the subject-matter of developmental psychology since G. Stanley Hall published his classic article on the contents of children's minds



upon entering kindergarten in 1891.<sup>1</sup> Psychologists have spent lifetimes attempting to explain, on the one hand, the human capacities that constitute intellect, and on the other, the changes that occur in their structure as the organism matures. Their efforts have been aimed at plotting the nature of mind, describing the basic aptitudes that humans possess. What are these aptitudes? How do they alter over time? Can the environment affect their development? And can teaching speed up the process? Let us briefly examine a few of the important theories of mind that address these questions.

One scheme widely used within educational circles that has a theory of mind implicit in it is the well-known taxonomy of educational objectives.<sup>2</sup> If we use that scheme as our model of mind we could come to believe that the human mind has three general capacities: the capacity to know, the capacity to feel, and the capacity to act. In more technical terms these are referred to as the cognitive, the affective, and the psychomotor. According to the cognitive taxonomy our capacity to know can be divided into six operations: we can possess information, understand it, we can apply it, analyze it, synthesize it and finally evaluate it. The other so-called "domains" have similar divisions or functions.

Yet if we read J. P. Guilford's work<sup>3</sup> and heed what he has to say about what he calls the structure of intellect, we would conclude that the human mind consists of 120 different aptitudes or capacities, not six, and that these 120 capacities are organized in relation to different types of semantic content. If we find Guilford too cumbersome and complex, we can turn to L. L. Thurstone and settle for a conception of mind that has six fundamental abilities.<sup>4</sup> The mind can deal with the spatial, the mechanical, the

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<sup>1</sup> G. Stanley Hall, "The Contents of Children's Minds On Entering School," *Pedagogical Seminary*.

<sup>2</sup> *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Cognitive Domain, The Classification of Educational Goals*, Benjamin Bloom et al. First Edition, New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1956.

<sup>3</sup> J. P. Guilford, *The Nature of Human Intelligence*, New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1967.

<sup>4</sup> L. L. Thurstone, *Primary Mental Abilities*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938.

verbal, the mathematical, with memory, and with reasoning. Thurstone has even defined these aptitudes operationally. His test of *Primary Mental Abilities*, or the PMA as it is called, is a means for securing profiles of these aptitudes for individuals.

But these views of mind might appear too static for some, in which case Piaget or Freud can be appealed to. If we seek a dynamic view of mind, we might find satisfaction in a conception that describes changes in its structure. Given Piaget's view, we would not only be able to anticipate the general states of cognitive development through which a child passes en route to maturity, we would also have fairly good approximations when those changes occur, and we would understand the kind of sense children of various ages were able to make of the world.

But Piaget's view, too, might appear to leave out perhaps what is most important about humans, their covert psychological lives, their deep-seated motives and needs, the devices they employ to cope with the pressures the world places upon them. We have surely learned that human behavior — including the behavior of children — is not always logical or governed by motives of which one is aware. What Piaget leaves out, Freud leaves in, and we seem not to want to do without either. The ego and the unconscious have become a part of our vocabulary.

This brief "Cook's tour" of cognitive theory was taken simply to illustrate the fact that there have been heroic and indeed useful efforts made throughout the centuries to understand the nature of mind, to identify the domains in which it functions, to describe its capacities, and to explain the course of its development.

Now it is not unreasonable for educators to have an interest in such work; if we knew what forms of cognition humans could potentially exercise, presumably we could do something about cultivating them through the kinds of programs we provide in schools. Further, if we knew how individuals were genetically programmed with respect to the unfolding of cognitive skills, we could time our curriculum and our instruction to its course. An adequate theory of mind, or even an eclectic collection of semi-adequate theories of mind, could be useful for guiding our educational decisions.

These theoretical views of the psychological sources of children's thinking have during the past fifteen years been joined by another development, emanating from research on hemispheric specialization. The research that has been done in this area by Sperry, Bogan, Gazzaniga, Witelson, Buffery, Milner, Zeidel, and others has indicated that different forms of thinking take place through operations located primarily in one or the other hemispheres of the brain.<sup>5</sup> These hemispheres, connected by a neural-network called the corpus callosum, function when individuals are required to deal with tasks that require analytic, sequential, or digital forms of thinking on the one hand and synthetic, analogical, and spatial forms of thinking on the other. What the research suggests — and I am certain that the last word on the subject has not as yet been spoken — is that the locations of particular thought processes differ, and that if a brain is damaged in one location, such injuries will not necessarily impair cognitive performance dependent upon processes located in uninjured sections.

What do the conceptions I have described and the work on hemispheric specialization mean for grasping the nature of man's mind? It seems to me that they suggest this. The human being is born with a profoundly rich capacity for different modes of thinking. These modes of thinking are part of the organism's psychological and genetic constitution. Factor analytic theorists such as J. P. Guilford and L. L. Thurstone have given us a sense of the variety of cognitive capabilities, and developmental theorists such as Jean Piaget have given us a sense of the changes in cognitive structure that occur as the individual matures. The efforts of all these people represent an attempt to illuminate basic human capacity, while some of them have attempted to locate the neurological sources of particular cognitive processes. What we can learn from their work is to appreciate the varieties of human potential, to have an appropriate regard for the different forms of thinking

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<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of research on brain functions and its relevance to education see: *Education and the Brain, The Sixty-Seventh Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II* (Jeanne S. C. Hall and Allan F. Mirsky, eds.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

that children can exercise. From their work we can get a sense for the psychological reservoir of human cognition.

Yet, as we know, development does not occur in a vacuum. Cognitive ability is not an automatic consequence of maturation. Its realization depends upon the cultural side of the equation reflected in the title of this paper. It is this side of the equation to which I would like to pay special attention because it is the only side that those of us who work in education can do much about. We typically do not perform surgical operations on the cortex, we do not typically use radiation to influence the character of genetic structure, we do not normally employ drugs to change the chemistry of the brain. For good or for ill, our tasks focus on the shaping of the environment. We are, in a sense, gatekeepers of culture, architects of microenvironments.

Study of the impact of culture on cognition has been undertaken by a variety of scholars. One of the earliest and most influential of them was Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf. It was Whorf who in 1939 advanced what is now called the Whorfian hypothesis.<sup>6</sup> This hypothesis holds essentially that speech was not simply a means through which humans communicate, but that it plays a much more active role in shaping thought. The language itself, the categories and concepts embedded within it, its analytic and temporal character determine to a large degree what humans are able to think about. Language, a central feature of any culture, provides the windows through which we perceive reality. And because different cultures possess different languages, the reality that each provides also differs.

Sapir, too, spoke about the importance of language, not only with respect to the significance of its concepts and categories in shaping thought, but with respect to its abstract and symbolic nature. Sapir writes:

The primary function of language is said to be communication. . . . The autistic speech of children seems to show that the purely communicative aspect of language has been exaggerated.

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<sup>6</sup> B. L. Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1956.



It is best to admit that language is primarily a vocal actualization of the tendency to see reality symbolically, that it is precisely this quality which renders it a fit instrument for communication and that it is in the actual give and take of social intercourse that it has been complicated and refined into the form in which it is known today.<sup>7</sup>

What Whorf and Sapir have given us is a view that reminds us of the reciprocity of language and cognition. For Whorf, language defines the categories through which we conceptualize reality, and for Sapir our inherent capacity to abstract and symbolize gives rise to language itself, which in turn shapes our thinking.

But compared to two major Soviet psychologists such as S. L. Vygotsky and A. R. Luria, the views of Whorf and Sapir regarding the impact of culture upon cognition are comparatively tame. Vygotsky<sup>8</sup> and Luria<sup>9</sup> have suggested that language is not only a means through which individuals think, but that the presence of literacy in a culture might affect the physiological structure of the brain. In other words, the impact of literacy is not only one of providing the categories for thought, it may also affect the pattern of neural-networks that occupy the cortex.

If we were to subscribe to the possibilities suggested by Vygotsky and Luria, it would have special meaning for those of us in education. First, it would mean that the character of mind is not determined once and for all at birth, but is influenced by what the organism is exposed to. Second, since exposure to different types of content and tasks is critical in developing human capacity, the decisions we make about the content of school programs are of the utmost importance. Third, since decisions about content inclusion and content exclusion in school curriculum and about the forms of teaching that will be used structure the students' experience, they also affect the kinds of minds they will eventually have.

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<sup>7</sup> Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, New York: Mentor Books, 1957, p. 99.

<sup>8</sup> L. S. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1962.

<sup>9</sup> A. R. Luria, *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Formulations*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Let me examine these implications in some detail. To do so, I will focus upon the concept of literacy, since attention to its development is a major aim of schooling. There is no question that throughout the country there has been a hue and cry to increase the level of literacy among children and adolescents. If you believe some people, the majority of our students are functionally illiterate. But what does it mean to be literate? From the public's vantage point the answer is clear: competence in the Three Rs. We must reemphasize the basics: reading, writing and arithmetic. By 1980 all children in all school districts in California will be required to be tested for competency in these skills. Let me suggest to you that despite the importance of the Three Rs, this view of literacy is extremely limited. Literacy can be conceived of, and I believe ought to be conceived of, as the process through which meaning is secured from language. Language, in turn, can be regarded as any patterned or structured form that functions as a vehicle for the expression of thought. Given this view of literacy and of language, we can now begin to ask questions about the content of thought and about the character of the patterns through which that content is expressed. If we ask such questions, we will find that the sensory systems play a critical role in thinking. In fact, man thinks through all of the sensory modalities he possesses and expresses what he thinks in a variety of languages, each of which appeals to or emphasizes the use of different sensory systems. Furthermore, given this view of the function and variety of language, namely that it is any patterned or structured vehicle for the expression of thought, literacy may be regarded as a competency in the decoding and encoding of content embedded within different patterns or forms. Thus, although an individual might be literate in one language, he might be semi-literate or illiterate in others.

Through what languages do humans think? What roles do the sensory systems play in thinking, and just what is needed to transform the content of thought into a language that others can share? In short, how do private forms of meaning become social? What is necessary for communication?

To illustrate the function sensory systems perform in thinking

I will need to ask you to participate in a small experiment. Let me ask you to think about a song and to sing it quietly to yourself. The first form of thinking that some of you used was probably verbal. You searched through a repertoire of names of songs until you settled for one that appealed and you thought you could sing to yourself. Once having decided upon the song, you proceeded to create its melody through auditory memory. You generated the auditory pattern that made your experience musical. Now suppose I asked you to create that melody once again but told you now you were to represent that melody in the form of a graph, and that following that you were to paint a picture of how the music appeared visually. Suppose further that I ask you to represent that melody in terms of the length of time it took you to hear it. Each of these tasks required the use of different forms of representation or, in other words, the use of different symbol systems. Let's examine each.

I already suggested that the first form of representation that some of you used was probably verbal and that is because it is much more efficient if one wants to select, to be able to scan a repertoire of titles than a repertoire of melodies. Titles are shorter, require less effort to produce and examine, and stand for a much more complex array of melodies. Since your first task was one of identification, some of you took the more efficient route. But once having identified the title of the song or melody, you recognized that a title is not the same as the song, and because the task as I put it was not simply to identify a song, but to sing it to yourself, you had to shift from one form of representation to another.

When I asked you to graph the music, another transformation took place, this one of a visual kind. To accomplish this task you had to schematically translate an auditory experience into a visual one by creating a visual pattern that corresponded to the changing sonorities of the music. When the notes in the music descended, the line descended; when the notes ascended, the line ascended. When a musical passage was long, the line was extended; when it was short, the line was shortened. Each aspect of the line you plotted as you heard the music was intended to correspond on a

one-to-one basis with the musical patterns you experienced, and you had to do this while thinking in two modes simultaneously: graphically and musically. The task was one of making music and matching lines. It was a matter of making and matching.

When I asked you to create a picture of the music, the problem became somewhat more complex, for here your task was not simply to create a discrete digital representation that corresponded to the music, but to create an expressive analog, something that transforms the music into a replete visual image. A picture is not the same as a diagram. To create a picture of the music you must create an expressive visual structure that captures and presents the characteristics of the music rather than one that schematizes its pitch and its duration. The demands of the former are not the same as those employed in the latter. A picture is expressive or figurative; a diagram is digital.

The last task I asked you to perform was to transform your musical experience into a temporal representation. To do this you needed (1) to hear the music covertly, (2) to estimate the time it lasted as an experience and (3) to represent your experience of time in a symbol system. That symbol system is, of course, number. You were able to represent an aspect of the music by using numerals.

Now what I believe we can learn from this little "experiment" is first that when we are asked to perform certain tasks, we have a repertoire of devices we can draw upon to cope with that task. Second, each device we can use presents only a limited aspect of the world to us. When we search for music through titles, what we experience is words, not music. When we wish to experience music, we must deal with auditory patterns, not words. Third, when we wish to transform music into a graph, we must both hear the music and be able to create a discrete digital symbol for it. Without the ability to hear the music the content for its diagrammatic representation would not be available, and, without the ability to conceive of a graph, a representation of the music could not be made. Fourth, our ability not only to represent what we have experienced but also to experience it in the first place depends



on our skill in mastering and using a symbol system. For example, unless we know how to use number to represent time, our ability to estimate the amount of time the music lasted would not be possible.

The point of this exercise is to illustrate the forms of thinking to which we have access and the forms of expression that we can use to represent what we think. I have referred to the former as languages and the capacity to express and secure meaning from them as literacy. In our experiment we employed a variety of languages. Some were verbal, others auditory; one was numerical, while others were visual. Of the visual type one was figurative, the other digital. What we were able to think about was made possible by the technologies of mind, by the forms of representation or, in other words, by the symbol systems we are able to use. What we are able to express also depends upon our ability to use symbol systems. We use such systems to transform what we are able to think about into a public form. Unless we are literate in notation, the musical melodies we create in our private musical moments are not likely to be shareable, unless, of course, we can sing or play them. They are condemned to provide pleasure largely to ourselves.

Our ability to use symbol systems not only affects our ability to express what we have experienced; it also affects our ability to decode what others have expressed. Unless we know how text is encoded, our ability to recover the meaning it possesses is remote. Unless we know how to decode musical expression, our ability to secure meaning from it is diminished. Unless we understand the languages of the visual arts, we are unlikely to find meaning in them. Unless the language of mathematics is known to us, we will find its statements incomprehensible. Let me turn now to the way symbol systems are patterned or structured.

If we examine the characteristics of symbol systems, we will find that some are highly rule-governed while others are not. In rule-governed symbol systems there is a set of conventions that specify what the symbols shall consist of and prescribe the "syntax" or rules that are to be employed when they are used. Speech and text for the most part, spelling, and all of mathematics are rule-

governed systems. A great deal of what goes on in elementary schools is aimed at teaching children what the symbols are within those systems and how to apply the appropriate rules for each. By learning the rules, we recover and express meaning.

Other symbol systems, however, are not rule-governed in this way. Consider literature. Neither the reading nor the writing of literature or poetry requires the application of rules in the way in which spelling, arithmetic and propositional non-literary text require the application of rules. As a matter of fact the anathema of literary meaning occurs when one treats literary material literally rather than figuratively. And when it comes to symbol systems such as the visual arts, music, dance, and theatre, the means that must be used for decoding and expressing meaning are not to be found in symbol systems that employ conventional, prescriptive rule-governed syntax. For example, a child who wishes to determine when he has finished adding a pair of numbers can determine this by subtracting the bottom number — the sum — from the one above it to see if it matches the number at the top. To check subtraction the child adds. To check multiplication the child divides. To check division the child multiplies. The child not only learns that he has completed the work, but also through the application of rules, which are the same for everyone, learns whether he has arrived at the correct answer. But how does a child know when he has completed a poem or a painting? How does he or she determine if it is “correct”? The answer here is that he must learn to judge. When a child uses symbol systems that are not rule-governed, he must learn to cope without the security that a conventional standard provides; thus a child using these symbol systems is required to exercise judgment.

There are certain important cognitive features to the exercise of judgment. In the first place, the locus for evaluation in judgment is more internal than external. One cannot rely upon external rules where none exist. In the second place, excellence in judgment depends upon the capacity to see what is subtle. One cannot judge what one is unaware of. In the perception of art, music, poetry, literature, what counts is often subtle. In the third place, one must

learn not only to tolerate but to appreciate alternative interpretations, multiple meanings, and indeed value, in some cases, the contributions of semantic ambiguity. Because the characteristics of symbol systems differ, the forms of human aptitude that they require and develop also differ. They differ not only in the character of the syntactical structure they possess, but as I have already indicated, in the sensory modalities that they emphasize.

I said earlier that competence in the use of symbol systems is not only needed for decoding the coded expressions of others and for expressing the content of one's thought, but also that the concepts that different symbol systems provide affect the content that we experience. By this I mean that the concepts that constitute the lexicon of particular symbol systems — musical concepts, linguistic concepts, visual concepts, numerical concepts — function as *anticipatory schemata*<sup>10</sup> for the perception and organization of the qualitative world we and our students inhabit. By "anticipatory schemata" — a term coined by Ulric Neisser — I mean those forms of anticipation, those models or ideals that direct our attention to the world. When we acquire a set of concepts that constitute the languages we learn to use, we also acquire the nets with which we fish. These net-like anticipatory schemata are woven to catch some fish but allow others to slip through. In this sense the acquisition of a form of literacy as I have defined it is not only a vehicle for the conceptualization and expression of meaning, it is also a set of tools that shapes our perception by bracketing particular forms of semantic content.

Given the conception of language I have described and the functions it performs with respect to the creation, expression, and communication of meaning, there are, I believe, certain significant implications for decision making about the kind of curriculum we make available in our schools. If literacy is not an automatic consequence of maturation and if the forms of literacy that children acquire are significantly affected by the opportunities for learning that we provide, then what we decide to teach is of the utmost

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<sup>10</sup> Ulrich Neisser, *Cognition and Reality: Principles and Implications of Cognitive Psychology*, San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1976.

importance. To carry the argument further, the kinds of minds that children are able to create are influenced by what we allow them to think about. In this light it should be apparent that an exclusive emphasis on the back-to-basics is basically an inadequate form of education. Such emphasis will deprive children of the opportunity to secure some of the major forms of meaning that culture has made available. Such an emphasis will lead to rank forms of cultural deprivation. Such an emphasis will succeed in creating armies of semi-literate adults, people unable to find meaning in the fine arts, in poetry, and in literature and uncomfortable with ambiguity and perhaps, even more important, dependent upon authority for the rules needed to make them feel secure. The absence of opportunities to learn how to make judgments in childhood may very well lead to difficulties in doing so as adults. Dogmatic conviction rather than critical inquiry might come to characterize our social attitudes and our expectations for others.

Perhaps some might believe that I am overstating the case. But simply ask what is happening in classrooms across the country. What is it that is believed to constitute the "solids"? What do the "basics" refer to? What has been happening not only to the teaching of the fine arts, but to the social studies, to the sciences and to the other so-called "non-essentials"? Whatever happened to the concept of the balanced curriculum? How much attention do the non-rule-governed fields secure? How much time is devoted in classrooms to cultivating those cognitive skills that enable children to visualize, to hear what is musical, to transform from one conceptual modality to another? And what shall children be left with when the ability to make such transformations fails to be developed? About what content will our writers write? The inability to see will leave them speechless, not because they do not know how to spell, but because they will have nothing to say. And what will a deafness to the cadence and the music of prose mean for the poetics of expression and for literature? After all, we write as much on the information provided by our ears as we do by using the rules of grammar. Indeed man has written and has spoken well before these rules were formulated. Does our current curricu-



lum tend to develop the literacy of eye and ear, or are they too regarded as a part of the beauty parlor of education, the gravy one adds after the meat and potatoes of schooling have been cooked?

I started this paper by distinguishing between the psychological and the cultural sources of children's thinking. The psychological sources reside in man's nature and the potentialities it possesses, the cultural sources in the symbolic forms that culture provides in order to refine and amplify those potentialities. The psychological will not develop without the aid of the cultural, and the cultural cannot be created without the use of the psychological. Although as educators we cannot do much about the genetic aptitudes the children we teach possess, we can do something about what we give them an opportunity to learn. We can do something about the cognitive processes we elicit and develop through what and how we teach. The realization of psychological potential depends upon the kind of experience humans have access to, their opportunity to learn how to use what culture provides.

This means paying attention to the curriculum. In practical terms it means that we need to provide the time for children to learn how to think musically, visually, poetically, kinesthetically, as well as to help them acquire the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. If time is not available for children to learn how to use these symbol systems during the course of the school week, they will simply not be likely to refine their ability to use them as modes of conceptualization and expression. At the very minimum the curriculum needs to be designed to guarantee that no child will be deprived of the opportunity to learn what such symbol systems have to offer.

Time, while a necessary condition, is not a sufficient one. With time must come a major effort at curriculum development and in-service education so that time is used effectively. What will be required here, as I see it, is for school districts and for each school staff to begin a process of identifying those content areas, formulating those activities and designing those tasks that are appropriate for students in their particular setting. Such planning can be facilitated by curriculum consultants, by school district resource

teachers, and by others who can be invited to assist in the process. I cannot go into the details of how such planning might occur, but that curriculum planning must occur is certain. We need to begin to think about the ways we can encourage children and adolescents to think in a variety of modalities and to express what they think in a variety of symbol systems. The planning process that needs to be undertaken will not be accomplished in a single in-service session, but will require an effort extending over a two- or three-year period. What I am talking about is not the comparatively simple problem of deciding upon the adoption of a new textbook, but the creation of new tasks, new problems, and new approaches to teaching.

To influence the content of curriculum and the forms of teaching we employ, we must provide educational leadership. From my vantage point — and it is one that both benefits and suffers from the comforts of a tenured position in a major university — leadership in education from educators has been limited. For too many school administrators the most useful tool is still the wet finger in the wind. In many respects this is understandable. Jobs are at stake. Test scores are down. Vulnerability is greater than it has been in years — and it has always been high.<sup>11</sup> Yet if we do not provide a wiser, more balanced, more informed view of what education should be for the 47,000,000 students in American schools, who will? The press appears interested in hot copy, captivating headlines and alarmist text. No one seems to have a kind word to say about the schools these days. I believe we have a moral and a professional obligation to our students to help their parents and the larger community understand that neither children nor the society in general will benefit from slogans, band-wagons and other simplistic nostrums to solve complex educational problems. A return to the past is no way to prepare for the future.

I started this paper by reminding us of Aristotle's observation that "man by nature, seeks to know." Perhaps the best way to end

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the vulnerability of school administrators, see Raymond Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

it is to remind us that this is in large part what schools are for: to help the young acquire the skills that will enable them to know. We cannot afford schools that in the name of rigor, discipline and substance deprive young minds of the opportunities they need to develop. We cannot afford a school system that graduates semi-literate children. We cannot afford an army of young adults leaving schools culturally deprived. We need school programs that do justice to the scope of their minds and teachers who can create the kinds of environments within schools in which those minds can flourish.



MARCIA BEDWELL

## WATER SESTINA

Mother and I walk to the pond.  
Slowly we move, as if in dream,  
or water, more slowly than clouds  
on windless days. We walk the way  
one takes when taking wine and bread,  
when remembering the dead.

She cannot say that he is dead  
whose life is in her like a pond,  
deep as the ritual of bread  
and wine, radiant as the dream  
that in death we rise to clouds  
and gather in a sacred way.

We stand by the pond, the way  
we stand in the presence of dead  
loves, mute, like them, remote as clouds.  
Before us, cold and calm, the pond  
composes life into a dream.  
Slowly we break our gift of bread.

Slowly we break our gift of bread,  
and quickly, in their comely way,  
mallards stir the pond's cold dream  
to quacking. Stirring the dead  
calm, stirring to life the pond,  
gliding through rippling water clouds.

They are themselves like little clouds,  
a rain of bills upon the bread.  
But she does not see this pond,  
this rain; her face is turned away.  
She cannot tell me he is dead,  
and she cannot tell me the dream

She is floating upon, the dream  
that the dear dead are like clouds,  
so are never really dead.  
And children are wine and bread.  
And I am the gift, in a way,  
she offers him, who is the pond

She floats upon — in her dream,  
in her dark air of wine and bread.  
Her hands are cold as the pond.

THEODORE HALL



# Back to Basics

## *More Dreams Deferred*

IRVING HAINER

Located in a black community of 52,000 people, in Baltimore, Maryland, the Park Heights Street Academy is a private secondary school. Fashioned after the famous New York Street Academy and the Harlem Preparatory School, the Academy's 100 students are selected from a special, though difficult, population. Classically referred to as dropouts, these students are between 14 and 21 years old, out-of-school and without high school diplomas.

The Academy offers a broadly conceived educational experience without compromising on minimum competencies and basic skills. Special attention is given to the breadth of the program because the Academy realizes the limitations that the "back to basics" movement holds, especially for black urban youth.

The recent attempt by educational reformers to recreate the suspect glory of bygone days has come in the form of basic fundamentals and measurable competency. Buried in the crevices of this movement are possible consequences, perhaps unintended, that have significance for the dreams and aspirations of black urban youth. There are important consequences for all youth, but in thinking about the simultaneous and somewhat complementary movements—back to basics and minimum competencies—it is useful to focus on those youth that make up a substantial part of the nation's urban school population.

Furthermore, the focus on urban black youth is noteworthy

because, before the demise of the formal civil rights movement, educational opportunity had been the primary concern of black leadership. Since the recent recession and the subsequent inflationary spiral, black leaders and families have been calling for employment opportunities for black teenagers, the most under-employed segment of the American population.<sup>1</sup>

It is probably not coincidental that the push for basic education and demonstrable competence has appeared at the same time that important forces in the black community are clamoring for youth employment programs. If one were to accept completely the principal tenet — pervasive illiteracy — of the movements for fundamentals and minimum competencies, black youth, and all youth, would be unemployable even if employment programs were developed. However, this is not the case, as is evidenced by the disproportionate rate of white and black youth unemployment. Even more important, though perplexing, is the tendency among black professionals and parents to be supporters of the new reform efforts.

The segments of the black community that support these new movements present a unique, though old, dilemma to educators concentrating on the education of black youth. The dilemma takes the form of a choice between two extremes: education in the fundamentals to insure minimum competencies for the world of work and education broadly conceived so that young people might develop the capacity to think critically, make choices and pursue higher horizons.

Proponents of fundamentals and minimum competencies would appear to have an unassailable position. They argue that minimum competencies are essential survival skills that must be transmitted at all cost. However, for many decades black students have experienced second-class survival education, most of which focused on the fundamentals in preparation for the world of work. Given this reality, it is not convincing that these proposed reforms would render black youth any more competitive in the job market. Instead it

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Anderson, "The Youth Unemployment Crises," *The Urban League Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter, 1977, pages 16-21.

would seem more reasonable to conclude that the inability of freshmen students entering Harvard, Yale and Princeton to satisfactorily complete the core curriculum, coupled with 60 percent of the freshmen students entering the University of California being required to take remedial English courses, constitutes the centerpiece of the back to basics and minimum competency movements.<sup>2</sup>

With the development of civil rights laws and national educational opportunity programs, it would make good sense to direct educational resources for urban black youth in the direction of maximum competencies — acquiring basic skills as well as the capacity to think critically and make choices. This approach is as laudable as the obscure meaning of minimum competencies. There are no agreed upon minimums which a student is expected to achieve. At the present time the notion of competencies means “ability.” In the face of the poor public standing of ability testing, such a meaning may be ludicrous. Competencies also mean “life skills,” “survival skills,” “essential skills” and the “capacity to function in society.”<sup>3</sup>

Skill acquisition and performance to publicly acceptable standards are the narrowest of the many goals of education. For urban black youth, a population with severely limited options, a broadly conceived education would offer more options. The obvious issue is how to accomplish this end in the face of growing pressure to limit the learning process to fundamentals and minimum competencies. There are no easy answers, but a perspective that does not cast fundamentals in absolute opposition to a broad educational experience opens some possibilities. One such possibility is the effort at the Park Heights Street Academy.

The primary goal of the Academy is to create opportunities for self-determination, self-fulfillment and autonomy for young people who, for a variety of reasons, have been denied such opportunities

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Lasch, “The New Illiteracy,” *New Times*, Vol. 12, No. 1, January 8, 1979, pages 30-36.

<sup>3</sup> Walt Haney and George Madans, “Making Sense of the Competency Testing Movement,” *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 48, No. 4, November, 1978, pages 462-484.

in the past. In order to achieve this goal at least two concerns must be addressed directly.

By developing proficiencies in the basic skills, students are prepared to meet the demands placed upon them by a complex social world. If they are not prepared to meet these demands, their lives devolve into a series of frustrations, disappointments and subjugations to arbitrary authority. It is this preparation that creates the opportunity for self-direction which is necessary if these young people are to avoid becoming victims of the demands placed upon them.

It is not sufficient to merely create proficiencies to meet the demands of the world. These proficiencies are merely instruments. The students' sense of self, a sense of heritage, a notion of where they have come from and where they are going, must also be developed. This development creates a basis for critical and constructive examination of the world. Regardless of preparation and one's sense of identity, if students cannot adequately manage the demands placed on them, if they cannot adequately negotiate the reality of their lives, they become part of the problems that now afflict the cities and not part of the solution to those problems.

To realize successfully the goal of the Academy, major emphasis is placed upon the following three areas: (1) development of proficiencies in mathematics and language arts; (2) knowledge of the world and the universe of alternatives; and (3) orientations toward the world.

The development of basic cognitive proficiencies is absolutely essential if skills are to be developed which are necessary to meet the demands placed upon the individual. Without such skills it would be impossible for the students to meet successfully the demands that will be placed upon them as they seek to create fulfilling lifestyles.

These skills alone are not sufficient. Students must gain accurate and significant knowledge about the world and the universe of alternatives. This knowledge is the basis for any constructive and critical examination of contemporary society and their own lives. With such knowledge it becomes possible for students to consider



the alternatives with which to approach not only their own personal development but also the development of the society in which they live. Thus, this segment of the curriculum addresses the study of the arts, the humanities and science. Without such information it is impossible for students to have a reasonable and informed view of the world and themselves. The objective is to develop analytical knowledge of the world and to enable the student to reflect systematically upon not only alternatives for their personal lives but also various alternatives for the development of society.

As a complement to cognitive proficiencies and knowledge about alternatives, the curriculum reserves a place for reflective examination of the practical aspects of managing life. Frequently students find themselves in difficulty not because of cognitive deficiencies or lack of knowledge but because of their orientation toward the world and the manner in which they seek to manage their lives. Information about the practice of the world is as important as knowledge about the nature of the world. This segment of the curriculum emphasizes the treatment of practical problems in life and the development of strategies to deal with them. It covers a variety of issues such as relations to authorities, families and the job market. The objective of this section is to develop practical problem solving skills by the use of role playing and simulation. The expected outcome is significant attitude change with respect to the practical problems of everyday life.

The two segments of the curriculum that go beyond basic proficiencies are worthy of further mention because it is customary to find trade-offs among these curriculum areas in narrowly conceived educational settings. The section of the curriculum called Knowledge and the Universe of Alternatives is the central aspect of the curriculum. It is here that the cognitive skills imparted in the mathematics and language arts component of the curriculum become animated with purpose.

Orientations toward Life is the segment of the curriculum that undertakes systematic reflection upon the student's own experiences and lifestyle. It is intimately related to the other aspects of

the curriculum and may be the key to successful implementation of those aspects. The reason for this is that a student's orientation can be a serious obstacle to engaging successfully the activities required by the curriculum. A student's experiences directly shape the manner in which the diverse demands of daily life are managed. The curriculum offers the occasion to consider orientations toward issues that may vary from the deeply personal to mundane strategies for such things as job interviews or dealing with landlords. In small groups of eight to ten, students meet twice a week to discuss their orientation toward issues.

The Park Heights Street Academy has attempted to organize its program so that it falls in the middle of two extremes. However, if pressed, the Academy's student and parent community, along with members of the general community, would likely opt for a broadly conceived educational setting. Although the Academy is but one school, experience has taught that minimalist strategies for serving urban black youth violently conflict with the day-to-day lives of students. Television, newspapers, street corner hustlers all convey the message that success begins with big dreams. Educational experiences that do not challenge the dreams of young people with more than the basics and minimum competencies merely defer the dreams. In the case of black youth it is a matter of more dreams being deferred. Eventually deferred dreams wilt and dry up, giving way to rage, hate and the cycle of poverty that is infamous for trapping urban youth.

Urban youth are often poorly educated and are underemployed. To the extent that the back to basics and minimum competency movements represent what is in vogue in education, it is important that the reforms not become ends in themselves. The central point to be made here is that, now more than ever before, students require educational experiences that expand their options rather than limit them. In reviewing what some of the obvious concerns are about the minimalist educational reforms, I have offered no clear-cut remedies for the mounting pressure to educate minimally. The discussion about the Park Heights Street Academy does no more than briefly explain how a small group of people are thinking

about and organizing educational opportunities for some urban students. Our response to the pressure for competence and basic education is to place emphasis on students' developing basic proficiencies while they have other important educational experiences. The Academy has refused to defer dreams by returning to the basics at the expense of valuable experiences.

*LILLIAN'S DAUGHTER PULLS UP  
HER MOTHER'S GARDEN*

Does she wonder what is holding the broccoli stalks up?  
Is there a movement afoot at the nursery school  
    against mothers who work and plant gardens?  
Or does she simply hate vegetables?

Is this about birth, sex, or death:  
    the seed she was, the exact location  
    of the birth hole, whether she *is* too big  
    to fall through

Or is it about separation  
    the gold trumpet flower from the squash vine  
    the squash vine from the gaping earth  
    the mother from the husband  
    the father from the child

The tow-head daughter weeps  
    in her room for hours  
    for the wilted foliage on its side

What exactly is yanked up here  
    roots naked and quivering  
    in the awful light?

JUDITH W. STEINBERGH



JOHN OLCA Y



# Art, Sex and Death in Secondary Schools

CHRISTOPHER D. KIRKLAND

"I am simply calling attention to the fact that  
fine art is the only teacher except torture."

— Bernard Shaw

The "Hearts and Minds" conclusion to *Attitudes*, a report on The Andover Symposium on Learning in Adolescence, tries to justify the Symposium's relative disinterest in secondary school athletics and religion. But the Symposium also largely and unjustifiably slighted or skirted other topics more vital to the adolescent, specifically interests as eminent as art, sex and death. Suppressing and ignoring the contortions of the adolescent heart and mind in such interests may get schools exactly what they most abhor: unicorns in gardens and fetuses in toilets. As an alternative, reapproaching art in the secondary schools can turn these inevitable interests to advantage. In short, deathless art has sex appeal. Happily, and unlike sex and death, art also offers both involvement and distance simultaneously.

Traditional secondary school approaches to art as education often manage to defeat just these qualities. Schools bus groups to the art museum to humble kids before masters, exhausting their interest before engaging it; all distance, no involvement. Schools stage kids in I sing-I dance-I act theatrics, elevating them before the adoring approval of parents and friends; all involvement, no distance. Some schools can place Nikons, or palettes and oils in

yet awkward hands, or sit them darkly before projections of slides detailing a cryptic symbol hanging in the upper left from a single gossamer thread, and can require students to memorize title, name, date and school; non-involvement out-distanced. Other schools trumpet artists into the schools. If the artists are lucky enough to survive jumping off the boiling pot's podium, they must dodge the arrows of teacher envy and avoid getting eaten alive by two or three of the more hungrily aggressive student cannibals among the tribe; over-involvement under-distanced.

Consider the school bus trip to the art museum, those proper places of the privileged stereotypically disaffecting to the neighborhood kids. Those attributes which make an art museum so naturally popular as a tourist attraction and so difficult to popularize even among the adult citizenry of its own city cast a pall over the excursion from its inception. First, to be seen at many museums even an artist has to be established, or half-dead. To be an artist seen at the Louvre, you've got to be completely dead, or a very good fake. When Pablo Picasso died on April 8, 1973, the French art world immediately began to speculate on whether the disposition of his art collection—including works by several living artists, among them Balthus and Joan Miró—would break the Louvre's 300-year-old convention of welcoming only the works of dead artists into its permanent collection. Picasso's collection also included some very likely fakes, attributed to Gauguin, Corot, Chardin and Le Nain. Though secondary school students are certainly not Picassos, dead, or fake, they generally suffer another sort of death upon entering an art museum. As most schools do it, they might as well carry students feet first into a mortuary.

Even though most art museums and galleries are sexy spaces filled with life and death images, with interesting looking people and things, gorgeous colors and fascinating shapes, docents parrot dates and names to kids interested much more in today's date and their own names. When they might be allowed to peer beyond Norman Rockwellism in a painting or two they like, guides flood their senses and exhaust them physically with room after room.

"Even the experts don't agree on the authenticity of the Na-

tional Gallery of Art's *Girl with the Red Hat*, long attributed to the 17th-century Dutch artist Vermeer. The controversy could continue for years," says the guide. The student has yawned long ago, and will never wonder about that startling face caught between splashes of a white lace collar and the wide orbit of a red feathered hat. But a quartet of boys on their own at the Philadelphia Museum's "France's Second Empire" found their own special pleasures and lessons from "the epoch's bourgeois dreams of carnality" while speculating about Jean-Jacques Henner's bulky but *Chaste Susanna* getting into her bath.

Hundreds of London teen-agers, one girl wearing "I am a British Genius" on her tee shirt and waving a small stars and stripes, press raptly up to the Chicago Symphony for a Royal Albert Hall Promenade concert of Anton Bruckner's "Symphony No. 7 in E Major" conducted by Sir Georg Solti. In a 1975 concert by the New York Philharmonic the Promenaders chanted "What's a nice orchestra like you doing in a place like this?" It is hard to imagine as much contagious fun and enthusiasm in the fine arts where the *London Daily Telegraph* hypes a sensation and a scandal over "When is a Constable not a Constable?" True, Solti skirts controversy briefly by citing a Viennese professor who told him that a "not hurried" on the second movement's score is not in Bruckner's handwriting, but this differs from scandalmongering because Lionel Constable's more sparing application of paints allows more ground to be exposed, he prefers "pinkish-mauve skies and a scattering of tall grasses or flowers across otherwise empty foreground," and his twigs and clouds are "not at all the equal of those painted by his father," John Constable.

"If such famous and valuable paintings can be misattributed," harrumphs the *Telegraph*, "investors should be warned." That the British Rail Pension Fund invests three to four percent of its capital in art may be as close as either Constable gets to the people, and it is a rare teen-ager who is interested in the calligraphy of dates that fascinate the art historian, the reasonable guesses, smudges, overmarks and trimmed edges which intrigue those who write a catalogue raisonné.

A teacher said, to parody a self-parody, "I do not think we shall ever see a tree by John so totally devoid of life, or one by Lionel in which the drawing so convincingly conveys the anatomy of growth." Would even Joyce Kilmer, or any given teen-ager, ever believe that only John can make a tree?

Meanwhile, Sparky Valdez cruises his chopper from Mariposa to Galapago Streets on the sunny side of the Denver Art Museum, and raises the question not of how to get art into Sparky, but how to get Sparky into art. After his brother Alfred died in 1853, Lionel Constable is said to have lost interest in painting, "preferring instead to devote his leisure time to cruising in a small yacht." How might we reverse that direction, befriend Sparky and bring him in, chain his chopper out front, join him, follow him and reinforce what he might like inside the art museum?

Somewhere well short of encouraging adolescents to think of themselves either as artists or art critics or scholars, yet somewhere far beyond humbling them in front of mankind's greatest artistic accomplishments, lies a more gently and deeply persuasive opportunity wherein educable familiarity and comfort with both the aesthetic and social role and commentary of the artist can enrich and ennoble the perceptions, sensitivities and everyday lives of our students. The humanizing power of art, its unavoidable insistence of the acknowledging and valuing of different ways of seeing things, so often remains an untapped resource among millions who live virtually without the advantages of artistic conscience. They live in a world which, from their point of view, might as well be artless.

Our secondary schools can do much in remedy. They can challenge all aspects of formal and direct approaches currently taken toward the arts in schools today, and also the current notion that schools just need more of the arts. Much more to the point, schools need to use fundamentally different approaches toward art and attitudes designed to dispel art's conventional myth, mystery, magic and majesty.

Using and practicing the skills and crafts of art, we can train teen-agers to see differently, even as they protect and sustain the informing integrity of their own childhood's dreams and visions.



We can develop their capacity for thinking about a single problem in several different and appropriately modern ways, requiring and rehearsing the conditions by which a person comes to personal terms with works of art, developing that as a resource for that person facing the major and minor harmonies and conflicts of daily life. Secondary schools can concentrate not so much on dabbling in the education of the artists, but on new and unconventional ways of discovering and developing a normal teen-ager's susceptibility to and potentiality for the humanity of art. They can approach and develop a more personally productive, constructive and supportive receptivity to art.

In many places art can and does become a major influence in the lives of children, in others it does not, in a few perhaps it can not. But there are few high school disciplines or subject matters beyond the range and help of more artistic expression, there are fewer high school teachers who would not be happier and more productive with a clearer and more practical recognition of themselves as artists. Art so often can provide that cherished bridge between teacher and student that even as minor artists, they can work together much more realistically. The geometry teacher can learn much from contemplating the envy of the aging ballerina for the supple body of her fifteen-year-old dance student, from the student's ambitions to acquire the experience and expertise of the teacher. To think that the same kind or order of relationship now happens in the usual high school math or English classroom is to think Picasso scribbled. To think that it can't happen is to think that he didn't. Clearly, secondary school teachers can better direct the gaudy fashions and quiet powers of art to enhance the susceptibilities of their students.

Although loaded by a celebrity gimmick, other aspects of filmmaker Richard Brown's course at Manhattan's The New School suggest much in the way of technique and practice for the contemplation of the high school teacher interested in transferring from conveying conventional authority to the novelty of more artful teaching. Brown's approaches apply in many disciplines beyond film or artistic subject matters.

In Brown's "Filmmakers on Filmmaking," several days after

screening a movie but some weeks before public release, 550 students gather on Thursday nights to talk about it. Among them usually sits someone in the film, a Warren Beatty, Burt Reynolds, Shirley MacLaine, Woody Allen, Richard Dreyfuss or Mel Brooks.

"The essence of course," says Brown, "is an exchange of ideas between people who love to make films and people who love to watch films." Brown's credo: "I never tell students how to feel about a film. I don't tell them how I feel about a film." Well aware of the power of his authority as a professional and as a teacher, he avoids programming their reactions and tries to "come on to it in a completely neutral position, encouraging them to talk honestly about their feelings, . . . and then trying to put them in touch with the reasons that they had that reaction to a particular sequence." The dozen or so students who speak up represent the group's spectrum of ideas. After thirty to forty-five minutes of discussion, he invites the guest celebrities to come out of the audience and represent their own feelings. Ironically, the famous talents come not to enhance but to dispel the mystery and the magic of their image. Generally, they express interest in coming back to serve students directly, and so to foster a love for the motion picture form, in Brown's words. "And the way we do it is not by teaching in a conventional way."

In a semester Brown covers "all the basics of motion picture technique: sound scoring, editing, camera work, . . . everything from stunt work to post-production to pre-production location scouting; we discuss the whole thing, the gamut, much of it with the people who are really the specialists in the fields. But all of that is strictly a means to an end; that's to make the art form work better for you."

"Nobody who takes that class wants to be a filmmaker," says Brown. "Basically these people are attorneys, they're doctors, they're teachers, they're librarians, they're business executives. They are very successful in what they do. They haven't the slightest interest in starting a new career. They just want to make that art form work more effectively in their lives."

Brown says his course is about "exploring the emotions." He

picks new films not yet publicly shown or criticized. "More significant than the fact that the films are new is that we see them before people read reviews. They're not allowed to read reviews. Inherent in the premise of the course is the requirement that people not read any reviews at all, not watch television, that they come from their own position on this. They are thrown back on their own devices in terms of coming up with opinions and reactions."

His students "make comments not on whether it was a bad or good film, but whether it was a bad or good film for them." Whether there are bad or good films he calls nonsense; he dismisses that a large number of people, subject to critical persuasion, agree that a film is bad or good, and scorns judging a film by how many out of a hundred people find a film good or bad as "quantitative." "What people must understand is that the film is a personal experience." Instead, they waste tremendous energy and emotional commitment in trying to get the right agreement, "in trying to figure out what films they should like because those are the right films to like." He attacks this preoccupation as "pathetic" because it is "self-destructive, and what we do in the class is we give them the courage to go into a movie and have an honest emotional reaction. There's tremendous freeing up, tremendous liberation of the spirit. You find men sitting there who for the first time in their lives, they're crying in a movie, because the experience is about what it is to them emotionally. It's not about trying to conform to a societal code."

Films are like dreams, dreams you watch unfold on a screen in front of you. Films are the closest thing that we have to dreams, and dreams are the closest thing that we have to understanding the unconscious, which is really what our lives are about. I think it's always been a very special experience, always related to dreams, always very personal.

After the running of a film called "The End," his students got into "a very heavy, powerful discussion about death" with Burt Reynolds, "about the need to laugh at death." They discussed filmmaking and artistic portrayal of death, "but really what we were

talking about was how each of us faced death. That's what that class was about, and it was devastating."

Though Brown is clearly a disciple of film as his ideal medium, teachers can readily adapt his approach to their own chosen ideal media, be it history, physics or whatever.

I feel a need to teach, and a need to allow them to make the most of the medium, to let the medium work for them, not just simply sit and be entertained — and there's nothing wrong with that. But it can be so much more.

Film helps me as a teacher. I'm interested in raising people's consciousness, in putting them in touch with their feelings, in helping them to understand their own emotional reactions, their own emotional lives, what works for them in their lives, what fails for them in their lives. Film is the ideal medium to do this. It's a very effective medium. I have found that you can use motion pictures really as a means to an end, to get people talking about their lives, to get people talking about themselves; and that they relate to films in a way that creates a very non-threatening environment.

In high school teaching, it is high time for renaissance. The teacher who finds English literature an ideal medium can tap into and enrich adolescent perspective and preoccupation with sex, death and identity by considering the details of adolescent tragedy in "The Taming of the Shrew," "Romeo and Juliet" and "Hamlet," or considering Coleridge's "Christabel," the awakening of a sleeping girl as a sadder but wiser woman, who exchanges indulging a mediievally phallic fantasy for acknowledging with Geraldine the startling if suppressible realities of adolescent homosexuality, simultaneously evil, good, true and beautiful. The geometry teacher can alert students more explicitly to the practical and aesthetic properties, magnitudes, joys and despairs of line, shape, space and surface; the physics teacher to the pleasures and tortures of force, stress and friction in matter and energy; the algebra teacher to giddy and tedious extremes and compromises in symbols of ratio, proportion and equilibrium.



We do not need, nor can we afford, interdisciplinary courses team taught, but the timely pressures on today's high school classrooms heavily inveigh upon us to teach our chosen subjects more simply and with the scope of broader cultural reference. Although traditional subject matters and disciplines abound in objective ways to talk with both engagement and distance of the real and proper interests of teen-agers, so much of what we screen out of adolescent education is the most arty, sexy, deathly stuff, probably nowhere more perfectly excluded than in conventional secondary school approaches to the arts. The tableau, structures and textures of painting, sculpture, dance and music paradoxically emerge as the most special and rarely penetrated regions wherein the art teacher can so brightly enlighten and glorify interests crucial to a soundly engaged and intelligently reflective adolescence.

*Richard Brown's "Filmmakers on Filmmaking" material is taken from a National Public Radio interview with Connie Goldman, courtesy of KCFR-FM, Denver.*



AMY MORTON

# 13 Days

*excerpts from a journal on using poetry  
with the emotionally handicapped*

RON OVERTON

*Note:* These are excerpts from a journal kept while teaching poetry writing several years ago in a special education classroom on Long Island. The eight students ranged in age from nine to twelve and were officially described as “emotionally handicapped” — which means the difficulties they had learning and growing were considered primarily due to emotional problems rather than to intellectual limits. I visited the classroom twice a week, always with the regular teacher, Catherine O'Brien, in the room. She was an extraordinary help, and I relied very heavily on her sense of what might work well and, at times, of what actually had gone on. I also relied very heavily on Kenneth Koch's good book, *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams*, for writing ideas. The formulaic ideas provided the structure that seemed necessary in asking children with long histories of academic difficulty to write poems.

I hope the journal suggests some things about how poetry can make a difference in any kind of classroom. But, first of all, I would like it to serve as a *documentation* of what happened when something usually reserved for students of high accomplishment was made available to students whose lives were defined by their very failure to accomplish things.

I continued working with this class, and with other special education classes in the same school, for several terms. Since then I have also done, through the New York State Poets in the Schools program, seven other special education projects involving both younger and older students, including the brain-injured and retarded.

As the journal excerpts demonstrate, there are good days and bad days. And as the above range of ages and classifications implies, each

program was different in its detail and contours. But poetry writing has been remarkably and consistently successful in these various settings. I believe its success means several things. That students with learning problems are not only responsive but good at poetry writing suggests that perhaps the activity draws on resources that are not tapped by *The Basics*. And the implication is that perhaps poetry, creative writing, the arts in general — usually regarded as frills, cultural icing on the educational cake — are as basic as *The Basics*. I wonder if we haven't too facilely equated intelligence with the mastering of skills that are easily measurable and gradeable. If that is the case, we may have denied many students an alternate way of demonstrating their intelligence and worth. In fact, it is the same restless liveliness of some of the students I've worked with that makes their poetry good and their academic performance bad. Many are sensitive (which I take to be an aspect of intelligence) but do not find that useful in math or geography. Many are better at imagining a new world or reporting on a buried world than they are at reciting the dimensions and grammars of what we like to call the real world.

This is not to say that it is enough if, while Mary masters reading and writing with ease, James — merely because he can — goes off in a corner and writes good poems. But we ought to understand better and value more what James can do. And we ought to find out if perhaps, for James, poetry might not be the best starting point for an interest in learning to read and write well. It has been my experience that a number of impressive student poets have not only shown they can do something special with language in poems, but that new power has ignited a desire in them to become more proficient at rudimentary reading and writing skills.

Two points then. Creativity ought to be valued more in the classroom as something *basic*, even if it can't be easily graded. And, allotted its proper value, rather than competing with *The Basics*, it can — I've seen it — dramatically influence a student's attitude and performance in those more traditional academic pursuits.

### *Pre-Program*

. . . The whole problem — as I see it now, beforehand, with nothing but Cathy's capsule biographies in hand — is how to

reach the unusual & disturbing accumulation of experience that sets these kids apart from other kids who have been able to negotiate the regular schools. How to vent some of the anger & give them a sense of validity. How to get them to put some value on their imaginations. How to get them to see their experiences, memories, fantasies as special & not shameful. This might mean exaggerated praise, but so what? God knows, they have some praise coming. The point of all this is not to make 8 polished, professional poets. It will be to help 8 kids who have had trouble fitting in come to terms with themselves, regard themselves a bit more highly. And to put them in touch with the advantages of language & self-expression. I don't even care if the activity is called poetry or creative writing or imaginative writing or whatever — as long as something happens to them that's new & helpful &, hopefully, even exciting. . . .

### *Session 1*

Session ran from 12:45 to 1:30, a time slot we'll stay with. Started with Roethke's "Dinky" (laughter by the end of it, mixed with uncertainty). Then read an Indian poem from *From the Belly of the Shark*. No reaction. Then a few poems from *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* — poems written by kids their own age. Attention mixed. They're amused, involved — then quickly distracted. So, on to writing something. Read a few lines from the collaborative wish poems in Koch's book, then to theirs: every line expressing a wish that includes a cartoon person, a place & a color. They dictate, I write it down.

Began by asking for whole lines from volunteers. Nothing. Stares. Then a few responses — some relevant to the formula, some not; some in a spirit of cooperation, some not. Evolved to collaboration over each line — someone chipping in a character, another yelling out a place, someone else a color. This went well, after the tentative start. All participated, except Bryant. Much laughter over the "purple underwear." They seemed — various kids, at various times — engaged in what we were doing. Though all drifted in & out. . . .



They *can* figure things out, they can add things up, make connections. They are verbal. But speech for them, this first time anyway, is a smoke screen — not an instrument for direct, sincere use. It's a way of fending off adults, whites, teachers. In fact, these kids seem to have learned to deal with everything indirectly. They were sizing me up much of the time, not very willing to open up to a stranger (with a strange mission). Which makes sense. They probably have every reason to be suspicious of adults. (Adults put them here.) They have a kind of security in this room, they have clear roles in this small community, then I come in & intrude. Some responded with silence (Bryant especially), some with a flamboyant indifference, one with outright hostility. Hopefully, the defenses will lessen after 2 or 3 sessions. . . .

## *Session 2*

Went much better. 3 new people (Larry, Kyle & Bruce) — all 3 bright & anxious to contribute. They seemed to have heard about the first session & were curious about what the others had done. We started with a discussion (that's no doubt too formal a term) of a Jacques Cousteau TV special (on penguins) broadcast last night. Most had seen it & wanted to talk about it, so we did — the ones who had seen it telling the 2 who hadn't what it was all about, others chipping in details & corrections. This really worked out well, because I had wanted to read an Eskimo poem with a petrel in it & there had been a petrel featured in the TV program. They liked the poem. Then read 3 or 4 poems by Black poets. The 5 Black kids very attentive, the 3 others interested too.

Then, on to slides of animals. They all got caught up in identifying them, pointing things out, asking questions about where the pictures were taken. A bit rushed at this point but managed to collect lines from 5 of them (Shirley out of it, had been punished just before I got there; Bryant still unwilling to talk; Sharon adrift). Cathy even contributed, at her students' request. That pleased them, made them more relaxed, less self-conscious. It's apparent that Bruce is very bright (he was most articulate about the slides),

that Larry will be helpful, that Kyle has — for some reason — decided to be very cooperative about writing poems. Even an encouraging note about Bryant. He's still completely silent for me, but he did mumble the title, "Dinky," to Cathy. The Roethke poem made some impression, somewhere.

Their lines were done in a hurry, but it was a good hurry. Gains today. They did their own lines, rather than just elements within the line. They didn't need as much prompting. When I read the wish poem from last week, they laughed & enjoyed it & were proud of it. They even remembered who contributed what to the poem. And their testing of me seems diminished. . . .

### *Session 3*

Read "Dinky" again, upon request. And read over their animal-wish poem, as far as it had gotten. Went on to a discussion of what it would really be like to be a particular animal — say, an octopus. Also, I had them list, from memory, what animals had appeared in the slide show & what animals had been missing. They showed impressive memories, this was very animated. (Successful I think because it didn't involve stringing things together. They back off when they're asked to go from words to phrases — really, I suppose, a problem of sustained thinking, a fear of it, of failing at it.) But actually saying what it would be like to be a giraffe, a turtle — thinking about how the world would be different — was tentative, cautious, slow.

So: went to working individually on animal-identification poems. My feeling was that the only way to find out if they were ready to work on their own was to try it. If not, that would become clear very quickly, & we could tactfully retreat back to group poems. It went surprisingly well. Landon had lots of trouble with the mechanical act of writing — he can hardly copy from the board & will need help. Larry bolted for the dictionary, which he shared with Bruce. Sharon worked hard & has considerable writing skill. Kyle started over — very concerned with his spelling, smiling & talking to himself — & did a decent short piece of writing. Shirley

was fine, did 2 things. The first, about a bear, was simple, clear & showed a highly detailed sense of a bear & its habits. Theresa, after the ostrich suggestion, finally got going & did well. I think it will work! They'll write, they'll be willing to sit down & do this. They worked with enthusiasm & intelligence. Violence is there in almost every poem, along with lots of eating. But I suppose that only means, already, they are opening up & really talking about what's on their minds.

Bryant, I'm afraid, is lost. He fought today, injuring another boy, who had to be taken to the hospital. So Bryant wasn't in the mood for poetry. It upset the others too & made for a slow start. He appears unreachable, despite the request for "Dinky." He's sullen, brooding, smoldering (no doubt especially so today since, as a result of his assault, he's now facing suspension). Yet, getting 7 out of 8 to write on their own is more than I expected this early. . . .

#### *Session 4*

Problems. 3 absent. Moving to a new school building has alienated Theresa, who has been staying home. Bryant has not returned since his 1-day suspension. And Bruce has been arrested, for stealing bicycles with his brothers, & taken to a shelter somewhere. All of which has its effect on the 5 present. Typical — the instability, people appearing & disappearing, fights, moving around from building to building. It's this lack of any fastness that makes this atmosphere different from the regular schools.

So, just 5. Kyle extremely alert. Larry interested, cautious. Landon — very small gains. Sharon & Shirley, competitive. Started by reading some strange-thing poems out of Koch's book. Explained the writing idea — poems that described windows made of popcorn, swans of bees, desks made of water. They began immediately, with modest excitement. One incident. Shirley had written some fine strange things, even ran over to show me. Sharon had finished too — a long piece of writing that concluded with a very vivid & hostile remark about Shirley. Shirley saw it, or heard it, & retaliated

— tacking on a line to her poem that put Sharon in a “dog mess.” OK, it was “accepted” by both Cathy & myself. But something must have been wrong in the tone, or the face, or Shirley simply sensed she had ruined a very carefully composed poem full of delicate & exotic objects, because she hesitated for a moment, then crumpled the paper up & threw it away.

This seems to illustrate how double-edged the volatility here can be. The anger — toward things in general, toward one another (it flares up, is gone, recurs), toward authority & school — can make for a lively session if you can bend it, quietly & quickly. Or it can completely louse you up. Related to this is the problem of the speedy workers, like Sharon & Shirley, who finish quickly, exhaust their interest, & then turn to this verbal fencing — really what they’re used to using language for. The trick will be to try & get them to go after their imaginations with words as aggressively as they go after one another with words. . . .

### *Session 5*

Arrived early, to take pictures. Kids enthusiastic. Don’t know how I’ll use these exactly, but it can’t hurt just to do this. Several have never had their pictures taken!

Went from this to reading a few of my poems, which Kyle & Larry requested. Then went to slides, of objects — trees, locks, clouds, jelly beans, towels, a boat, a car. Then to more strange-thing poems. Surprise of the day: Bryant participated — loudly & with much soul!

All of this is very encouraging. They appear less mechanical now (except for Larry & Landon) about what they’re doing. And they *enjoy* it (though Sharon will be damned if she’s going to show it). So, progress. It’s truly working out, even better than I thought it could. They’re good kids, with lots of untapped intelligence & imagination. It feels good to help them a little & see their delight begin to overcome their suspicion & anger. . . .



### Session 6

Linda (my wife) came in with me, with defense-shattering brownies. A small group: Bryant in high spirits, out of his shell; Sharon in a good mood; Larry, there; Kyle, toned down a bit by a knock on the head at recess. It was more relaxed today, more casual, taking a while to get started, letting them talk with Lin, waiting for Kyle to get back from the nurse. We did lie poems (encouraging them to use the colors, places, animals, strange things from our earlier poems). I read some examples from *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams*, & that got them off to a fast start. There's a reluctance now to do a group collaboration — I wanted them to say a few lie lines, just to make sure they got the idea. No. They wanted to write them down privately. Private property! But that's OK, they did some fine work. And — importantly — they knew they could. . . .

### Session 7

Arrived 10 minutes late, because of interviews at another school. Class too fractured — I felt hurried, new boy in class (Dale, replacing departed Bruce), & Bryant carrying on. Continued lie poems, but the explanation was a problem since Shirley & Landon had missed the previous session & Dale was coming in cold. Also, Shirley had been sick earlier in the day, Dale & Bryant had already brawled on the playground. So, not much. Larry continues to be cautious, looking up every word; Sharon continues to dump on people; Landon continues to be stumped; Kyle continues to fly; Shirley continues to feel threatened. . . .

Struck, today, by how little space we occupy in this large room. There's never that buzzing, elbowing excitement of a larger class at work. They work pretty much in isolation here — as they live, I think, not trusting anyone else for help or inspiration. . . .

### *Session 8*

First day back, after a long vacation. Hard for them to settle down. Given the long break, I decided to continue with lie poems. (Also, they have really taken to the liberty of being allowed to write down things that are absurd, outrageous, crazy.) All sat down (not always the case) & worked diligently. Theresa was there — for a change — & did no more than was asked. Dale began to catch on, though he started by writing down a song he (somewhat) remembered. Kyle — doing some wild experimenting with phrases stated, reversed, then restated with slight variation; he's got it, a truly uninhibited, inspired imagination. Larry worked more independently than he has so far, his best work. Landon — still minimal accomplishments, mostly staring off into space or down at the floor. Bryant — not in the room, not interested. . . .

The photographs I took are up in the room. Cathy's husband did a beautiful job printing them in his darkroom. Odd reactions from the kids — ignoring them, asking indirect questions, several obviously proud. Must take more, especially of Dale & Theresa, who weren't there that day. Perhaps we can do some autobiography poems based on the pictures. . . .

### *Session 9*

Once more, unfortunately, no time to talk with Cathy after school. Fuel shortage again. These post-session talks have been really useful to me. She can "read" them so much better than I can, can see progress where I can't (Bryant using the blunt-nosed scissors rather than the pointed ones to chase someone with!), & always has good suggestions about adjustments that will help make the writing successful. But of late we both scurry off, looking for gas. Anyway, we did winter poems. Went so-so. They didn't understand the writing idea very well (Winter is wearing a wooly hat, etc.), so they flew off in various directions. It didn't work, I think, for several reasons. First, I didn't have good examples to read, to *show* them what I had in mind. Second, winter is just a

bad season to write about — since it's distinctive more for what's missing than for what's there. It's barren & restrictive & they don't like it & they don't want to write about things they don't like. Third, the writing idea itself was too conceptual — the requirement to think metaphorically, to think in terms of representative images. I wouldn't have gone ahead with the idea — I could see the glazed looks — but I had promised it during the previous session, & several remembered, & prided themselves on remembering, so it seemed I couldn't change without doing damage. I've been told, & I've seen for myself, that being *consistent* here is extremely important. Their histories are too full of broken promises. . . .

### Session 10

A room full of people & activity. The best day yet for *esprit de corps* & work produced. All 8 were there, plus Linda, a teacher's aide, & the school psychologist. Entered with camera (for the second set of pictures) & brownies — both smash hits. Bryant & Dale were interested in the camera & wanted to take some pictures themselves. So they did. So the others (all) wanted to. So they did. This is the advantage of getting there with plenty of extra time — you can go with them, indulge these unanticipated interests & still have lots of time to work on poems. Anyway, there was much good feeling in the air — teasing, laughing, & some learning too. The class was like a river — lots of cross currents, white water, but a general direction. You had to get in it & go with it. Our noisiest, busiest & most productive meeting. Afterwards I knew it had been an exceptional session, though many of the exciting details were lost in the swirl of activity & I would be hard put to document the session's success for a disbeliever. . . .

We were left with about  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour for writing poems. We did "I used to / But now" poems, a 2 line form. And a new idea for them, again from the Koch book. All sat down, or at least quieted down — though when I gave the directions & examples, you wouldn't think anyone was listening. (They were.) This is really the first time Bryant has done something, on his own, willingly, showing

*interest* in the writing idea. It was frantic — looking at some art work they had done to go with their poems, taking pictures, helping with spelling, chatting with them, looking at work in progress, making suggestions. A rich, chaotic, satisfying culmination to working here. It was as though all had been preparation for this half hour of buzzing good feelings & creativity. . . .

### *Session 11*

Tried working with them individually on revisions for the impending poetry booklet. Not very successful. Others hung around, fooled around, seemed envious of the attention. I wanted to get some clarifications about titles, spellings etc., before typing up their work. Also wanted to let them choose 1 or 2 things they were proud of & would like me to run off. Should have allowed more time, though I don't think that was the problem. It's just not easy for them to feel easy about a relatively formal situation like sitting down with an adult & talking seriously about their work. . . . It could be that I approached this wrong, but my hunch is that this particular format has a limited usefulness with these kids. Did learn a couple of interesting things. Dale has opinions not only about which of his poems are best, but about the work of others as well. And Bryant remembers far more than I suspected, even back to those first few days of silent glaring. . . .

Went in tired today, which just doesn't work out. You must be alert & energetic for things to go well. You have to work to get them going & keep them going & I just didn't have the strength today to improvise & make all those small adjustments. . . .

### *Session 12*

Went in to run off copies of their poems. Called Cathy & had them do covers for the booklet. We got several that were quite good & ended up choosing on the grounds of who most needed the encouragement. It took all of our time — running the poems off, collating pages, choosing the cover — so they got their copies



just about 5 minutes before leaving the building. They seemed pleased, though the usual guarded reactions & expressions were there. They're still hard to figure. . . .

### *Session 13*

Wanted to continue with the "I used to / But now" form, but things went wrong from the start. Several were very hyper when I arrived — especially Bryant, who had had another "incident" that morning. Lots of roaming around the room, knocking pencils off desks, all that. When they finally seemed calmed & ready to write — Wham! a baseball from the playground shattered the window, scattering glass all around the room. Forget it. . . . Dale & Bryant wrote nothing, basking in the excitement of such concise, pervasive violence from out of nowhere. Landon tried, but he just couldn't handle the writing idea or the storm around him — & it was too late to start with something simpler. Sharon & Theresa worked, but couldn't shake the giddiness induced by the errant baseball. Which left Kyle & Shirley toiling seriously away. Bad luck, really, things that couldn't be anticipated or controlled. . . .

Various reactions to their informal poetry magazine, mainly good ones. One parent did question the decency of Bryant's naked-lady poem, another questioned the fact that the kids themselves had actually written the poems. But a poignant note from one parent & several others pinning poems to their refrigerators. The kids are excited about it, though still cautious. And not, I guess, without justification. Last session, after getting the booklet, Sharon showed hers to her bus driver, whose reply was, "Ah, crazy people can't write poems." Which sent Shirley spinning back into the building, crying, wanting Cathy to hold onto her booklet for safe-keeping. She knew she was upset enough to tear it up or throw it away. It's what these kids must absorb daily, as soon as they leave the shelter of the classroom. . . .

## INVENTIONS

*WANG CHIEH, May 11, 868 (?)*

I wish to record here  
how, before retiring,  
I folded these leaves  
and signed each lot

to keep them in sequence,  
gathered them hence  
with linen threads,  
cut two oak boards

and bound the whole  
with leather cord,  
they hold each  
leaf fast.

The whole opens  
like an apple,  
cut in half,  
inside these seeds.

*TS'AI LUN, 105 A.D.*

What shall I do  
with the cuttings  
from this rush cloth  
scribes write on?

Beat the scraps.  
Mix with water.  
Pour the substance  
on a bamboo screen.

A matted sheet  
of mulberry bark.  
A flat stuff.  
To write upon!

My secret flies  
from Samarkand  
to Baghdad to Egypt  
and Morocco.

Beware.  
How fire destroys it.  
Oh western cities.

*WEI TANG, 400 A.D.*

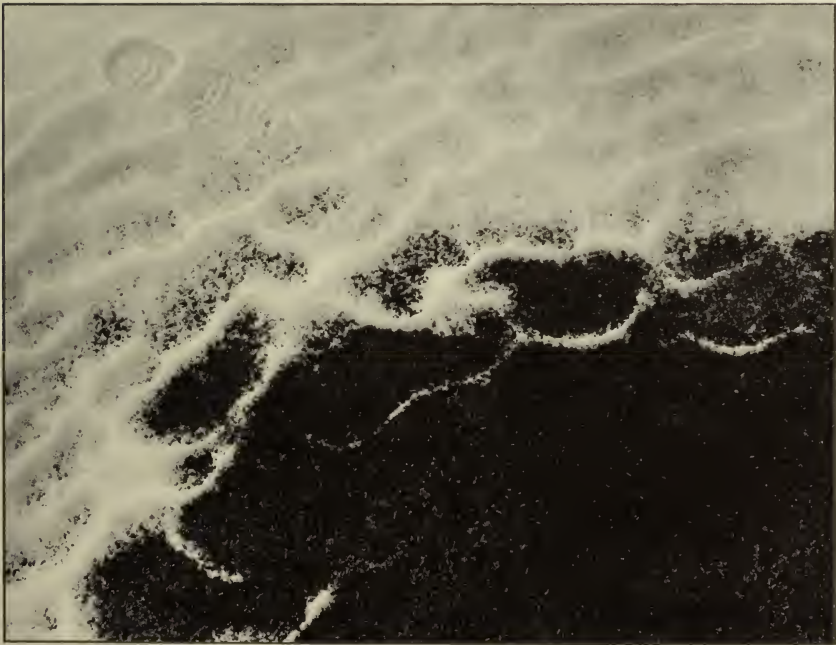
This lampblack  
stains my hands.  
My fingers  
cover this bowl,

the front of my robe,  
the bamboo mat,  
the floor.  
She will be angry.

My finger talks  
to a block of wood.  
Tells the same  
to a scrap of paper.

The secret  
repeats  
like a stain.  
Cannot be removed.

JANE BARNES



DAN WHEELER

# The Cat Outside the Window

CHARLES W. PRATT

The cardinal is the Christmas bird,  
And now, at Christmastime,  
Having come downhill across snow  
In a world so benignly silent  
That the whine of tires on the Thruway  
Joins with the swish of wind,  
And having pondered the prints of deer  
And the swaying stands of birch  
And talked of ownership,  
We are brought at the edge of the swamp  
Up short by this tableau:  
Two red wounds in the snow —  
A cardinal's body and head  
Ripped apart at the neck  
And dropped there, beak to tail.  
No sign of struggle or pain,  
And not a track in the snow  
To tell us of cat or fox;  
Something that struck from above.  
A message? But by whom sent,  
For whom and with what intent  
The entrails don't explain,  
Nor the small grey feathers, red-tipped,  
That smudge the canvas of snow  
Without disturbing the strange  
Surreal still-life in red  
We carry away when we go.



When my brother-in-law and I came across the ravaged cardinal in the woods this December, I was tempted by the fancy that someone was trying to tell me something. But what we had discovered was not intended for our eyes; whatever message we received would have to come from ourselves. Early in Dickens' *Great Expectations*, the terrified Pip, carrying his burden of stolen food to the convict in the marshes, sees his own guilt as the animating force of everything he encounters:

The gates and dikes and banks came bursting at me through the mist, as if they cried as plainly as could be, "A boy with Somebody-else's pork pie! Stop him!" The cattle came upon me with like suddenness, staring out of their eyes, and steaming out of their nostrils, "Holloa, young thief!" One black ox, with a white cravat on — who even had to my awakened conscience something of a clerical air — fixed me so obstinately with his eyes, and moved his blunt head round in such an accusatory manner as I moved round, that I blubbered out to him, "I couldn't help it, sir! It wasn't for myself I took it!"

Pip is very young and at the mercy of his own message. The process of maturing is a process of reaching a true relationship to the external world, not by making it over in our own image by physical or imaginative exploitation, but by understanding it and ourselves and adapting ourselves accordingly. In this always unfinished process one useful device is what is loosely called creative writing: the artistic formulation in words of often narrative materials, based of necessity but with varying degrees of accuracy and clarity on personal experience of one sort or another. My topic in this essay is some of the whys and hows of teaching such writing; I approach the topic by telling the story of an unexpected and unexpectedly successful informal class in poetry.

One recent evening, our 14-year-old daughter Sarah, having just sat in on a meeting with a group of students who get together once a week to read and discuss their poetry, told my wife and me that she wanted to write a poem; what could she write about? From somewhere arose the suggestion that she write about the cat, who

had also sat in on the meeting, but during it and afterwards had evinced only a desire to dream, none to write. But what *about* the cat? And how make it a poem? Sarah was concerned with poetic form; a learner by imitation, she wanted to mimic not only nature but art. My wife and I, however, easily persuaded her that rhyme and meter were not laws of God, man or nature, and scorning the free verse models I offered to find for her, she began to write. Within minutes, she had produced the following for our inspection:

She sits on the window sill  
Her eyes, bright yellow, staring in at us  
While we sit drowsily, eating our oatmeal

We hear a tapping at the window  
It is her long, black tail,  
reminding us of her presence

I rise, slowly advancing towards the door.  
I open it and she comes pattering in  
and stands by her bowl, meowing

I go to the cupboard and take out her dry food  
I pour it in the bowl  
the noise breaks the silence of the early morning

Then, all is silent as she eats

As I read, I pondered a frequent dilemma: how to balance criticism and encouragement. The solution in this instance seemed relatively easy; I knew well from experience the difficulty of teaching one's own child, and besides, the very impulse to write was a rare one, whose mere existence impressed and gratified me. I told her I liked the poem a lot, and my wife agreed.

But Sarah was unsatisfied with mere approval. What's *wrong* with it, she insisted; how can I make it better? Her demands made us look more closely at the poem. A safe beginning seemed to be the repetition of "sit" in the first stanza; Could you find a different

word for one of those? I asked. Sarah promptly changed the verb in the first line to “perches.” The picture suddenly jumped into focus; Oh, that’s good, I told her, that shows the contrast between her being bright and alert and our being sleepy. In response, Sarah changed “sit drowsily” to “slump drowsily.” What else is wrong? she demanded.

Now excited ourselves, we continued to examine the poem. “Reminding us of her presence” seemed flat and impersonal; but I was unsure how to put the problem most helpfully. Can you think of something that’s more what the cat would say if she were there and could speak? I asked. A couple of efforts produced a change that satisfied all of us. Next we asked what in the poem Sarah herself had doubts about. “Advancing towards the door,” she replied. What would be better? We asked her to walk to the door to see how she in fact advanced, and “stomping” immediately occurred to her as an emendation.

Finally we came to “the noise breaks the silence of the morning.” I dropped in the word “cliché” — as gently as I could, but I’m a teacher and couldn’t help myself — and asked what the noise was, what it was like. Again we tried the pulse of life test, pouring some of the catfood into the bowl.

And so, with a few more changes and additions, the following poem emerged:

#### Morning Meow

She perches on the window sill  
Her bright yellow eyes staring in at us  
While we slump drowsily, eating our oatmeal.

We hear a tapping at the window.  
It is her long, black tail,  
Reminding us that she is there, and hungry.

I rise slowly, stomping towards the door.  
I open it and she patters in  
And stands by her bowl, meowing.

I stumble to the cupboard and take out her dry food.  
I pour it in the bowl.  
It crackles like pebbles on a driveway.

Then all is quiet as she eats  
And we eat.

It is difficult to explain how exhilarating I found this experience. Teaching is such a depressing profession — as far as I'm concerned, the word "profession" applies only in the religious sense of an avowal of faith and purpose, not in the occupational sense, which implies a claim to expertise. Here we had seen in 15 minutes improvement of the kind one usually fails to see in a semester, or at least fails to recognize, and we believed honestly that we had shown Sarah the way to discoveries rather than simply rewriting her poem for her as we might have written it ourselves.

In the next week, I thought a good deal about what had occurred. I thought about the importance of readiness, of a student's asking to learn and actually listening to what is suggested and being capable of using it, of a teacher's having the time and freedom from pressure to give the help asked for. I thought about planning and chance. I thought about class size. And I thought about what Sarah had actually done to her poem, what the changes meant, how important such revision was or was not.

I make no great claims for either version of the poem. What matters is what happened between them, the refinement of Sarah's idea and therefore of the communication of her idea (or the other way around — the refinement of the communication of the idea and therefore of the idea). Isn't the practice of such refinement both the method and the purpose of the teaching of writing? And isn't poetry, or creative writing in general, an important field for such practice?

We need, however, some term other than creative writing; perhaps inventive writing. Creation suggests a divine capacity to make something out of nothing; it suggests that the created world is an autonomous one, a rival to the one we live in. Invention (a term of classical rhetoric, some crude research reveals, whereas creation



has been applied to works of man's art only relatively recently, since the 18th century) means discovery, the uncovering of something already there, or potentially there, in the world or the writer or the relationship between the two. Columbus (among others) invented America; he did not create it. Invention begins with trial and error, but goes on to the correction of error; it emphasizes the value of precision of vision and expression, not originality, which can take care of itself.

Inventive writing can be taught, as Sarah demanded that she be taught. When we think in terms of creative writing, we tend to consider every unpremeditated or premeditated work as a drop of the divine essence, or else to consider creation as the province of an inspired few; we conclude in either case that creative writing should not and indeed cannot be taught. English teachers and students often separate the mundane business of correction — setting straight — from the creative or personal. How can you grade poetry? students ask; with as much and as little hope of accuracy and productiveness as I can grade any writing, I answer. True, when one criticizes a piece of poetry, one is criticizing the author himself; but when one criticizes an essay or a math assignment, one is also criticizing the author himself, one is also trying to set him as well as his work straight; otherwise, educationally speaking, why bother? And punctuation and spelling and sentence structure (see Shakespeare's sonnet "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes . . ." or Frost's "The Silken Tent" for two spectacular proofs) mean at least as much in poetry as in prose, in fiction as in nonfiction. Diction is certainly of prime importance; in Sarah's poem, all the improvements are in this area. The problem of teaching poetry is not at all that anything goes, but that the craft at its best is too difficult. But one need not attack on all fronts at once; the important thing is that the learner sense improvement, and that goal is easy to achieve in teaching poetry.

The difficulties of the craft lead us to the question of form. Form is not merely a decorative embellishment; it is a means of distancing, objectifying, shaping experience, it is a way of thinking. Younger children in particular seem to seek and enjoy poetic form

for its own sake; they are given pleasure by rhyme and rhythm, by what adults or older children may find annoyingly artificial. As they grow older, their taste becomes more realistic, but they are seeking nonetheless formal means of representing reality. Sarah is unhappy with her drawings because they do not look like the objects represented; she considers her efforts not pleasingly stylized, but inept. Her artistic preference is the theater, because she has a natural bent for mimicry. Once she had been persuaded to forget the obvious manifestations of poetic form, then, her concern with improving the poem (or our concern, which she accepted wholeheartedly) was to make it look more as reality looked to her. But the quality of the poem has nonetheless much to do with form. The narrative fell, apparently of its own accord, into three-line stanzas, with a shorter stanza as a conclusion; in the final version, the result is surprisingly similar to a sonnet in construction. And the story has a clear beginning, middle and end, there is a pattern of the disturbance and reestablishment of peace, of outside and inside worlds being brought into harmony.

Sarah, I am sure, was and is unaware of these patterns. Our task as teachers that evening was to make her somewhat aware of them, to help her to read her own poem, to recognize her own intentions. One of the frustrations is that she finds the final version much less markedly superior to the first than we do. When she typed the poem over, for example, the "slump" in the third line became "sit" again (it was in the same retyping that the inversion of "bright yellow" and "eyes" was unintentionally lost). Asked whether she'd reverted deliberately to the original word, she was surprised to notice that she'd done so; she didn't find the difference significant, but since I seemed to, she offhandedly substituted the word "slouch," which to me was markedly superior to either of the other possibilities. Perhaps Sarah's relative indifference to such distinctions results from her already knowing what she means to say, but I suspect that it results from her not knowing what she *has* said. The old joke "How can I know what I think until I hear what I say?" is no joke; we can neither know nor think until we've spoken and have really heard what we've said. Nothing begins until there

are words, on the page or spoken or at least in the mind. I see a dead cardinal and sense a message; but I discover that message only by writing it down, reading what I've written, and then defining, refining, clarifying to the best of my ability. When I've done my best, I include the poem in with this essay so that other readers may help me understand. What we as readers see in literature that the author himself has missed is merely part of the unexplored potential of the words put down. "Perches" in the first line of Sarah's poem suggests bird which in context with cat suggests hunger which leads us to the bright yellow eyes. To discover this connection would be for her, I think, an advance in her understanding of experience and in her ability to form it. Teachers so often overestimate student work, no doubt, not merely because they themselves have ego invested in it, but also because they read into it much that might be there if only. . . . All the possibilities in the world are in Sarah's poem; Shakespeare would have made so much of it!

But Sarah is not Shakespeare; nor am I. We are both very minor poets. We need not be abashed by this fact. Anything worth doing is worth doing badly. Poetry (as Auden wrote in his elegy to Yeats) and other forms of inventive writing as well make nothing happen in the external world; that's one of their virtues. But they make things happen internally; they help us to see, to respond and so to live. Perfection is not the point; excellence is not the point; competence is not the point. The point is the exercise and development of the mental and emotional faculties. Whatever messages we receive will have to come from ourselves.



GREGORY MOTEN



# Measurable and Immeasurable Outcomes of Education

*How Much Is Measurable?*

JOHN A. VALENTINE

The occasion was a meeting of a council appointed to advise the College Board; the topic was a possible new program of examinations. Most of the Council members were college or school teachers, with the exception of two college students and a curriculum director in a large city school system. The opinions voiced ranged from positive to negative, optimistic to pessimistic. Those teaching mathematics, foreign languages and science appeared readier to see promise in a new set of examinations than those whose fields were art, English, history or social studies, who said, "There is too much testing going on already"; "tests measure only a small part of what students learn and too often the least important part."

To me this occasion was a microcosm of the continuing debate within educational circles about the virtues and faults of testing. As a staff member of the College Board and before that of Educational Testing Service I have followed and participated in this debate for many years. I have seen the debate take many different forms as the focus of attention has shifted from one kind of test to another, from one function to another and from one sort of

consequence or “backwash” effect to another. Educational testing may not be a topic with as much sweep and significance as sex or religion or politics, but it embraces an extraordinary range and diversity of phenomena, and it has the capacity of raising important questions and arousing serious concerns.

The topic is also one that can lead a person concerned about it to wonder about the source of the assumptions and feelings that predispose him toward certain positions, positive or negative, strongly felt or maintained with a sense of detachment. The discussion that took place at the meeting described above had this effect on me, as had previous discussions at other times and places. When Bob Lloyd, who was present at the meeting, asked me later if I would care to contribute to this issue of *The Andover Review*, giving my views on what is measurable and what is not, I could not resist the challenge to describe as best I could the suppositions that I bring to considerations of testing and measurement in education and how I think these suppositions have developed. Bob admitted to a certain perversity in asking a “tester” for his views, and I will admit to a certain lack of recognition of myself as a tester. Although my background includes a doctorate in psychology, with courses along the way in psychometrics, followed by the teaching of undergraduate and graduate courses in tests and measurements, and I have been closely involved with standardized tests throughout my career, I am aware of other important influences on the way I look at things. I am not at all sure that my views are typical of or shared by many of my professional colleagues, and in fairness to them I should make clear that in what follows I will be speaking strictly for myself and not for psychometricians in general, or for the College Board.

### *Almost Everything?*

My answer to the question of what is measureable has changed appreciably in the course of my lifetime. As I look back, I suspect I would have said “everything” at one point. This was when my enthusiasm for science and for psychology as a branch of science

was boundless. I was also a determinist. Every human act or feeling was predictable I believed, on theoretical grounds at least, although crudities of method and difficulties of amassing the necessary kinds and amounts of data limited the range of predictions that were possible in a practical sense.

Struggles with the question of free will resulted in a small but significant shift in my answer to "almost everything." I came to believe that there are occasions in human lives when a person might move either in direction A or B as a consequence of exactly the same set of observable/measurable circumstances.

I can trace the next change in my answer to a seminar on the Christian Idea of Education sponsored by the Kent School in 1955 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. The chairman of this seminar was William G. Pollard, Executive Director of the Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies, who was both an eminent physical scientist and an ordained Episcopal clergyman. An article by Dr. Pollard was made available to participants in the seminar bearing the title "The non-conceptual aspects of experience." In this article Pollard distinguished between the large and important area of human experience that is open to scientific inquiry and provides its grist, and the areas of at least equal scope and significance that science is not capable of touching or even approaching with its methods. I realized upon reading what Pollard had to say that I had been denying the importance if not the presence in my life of beliefs and feelings and gropings that all the psychology I knew or hoped to learn had little or no connection with. The effect altogether on me was to expand the domain of experiences I looked upon as beyond the reach of science and measurement.

Pollard's use of the term "non-conceptual" to refer to aspects of experience he regarded as not subject to science carried the implication that science deals necessarily with conceptual aspects. He made the point that science depends on relationships between observations that can independently be made and some kind of commonly understood concept or abstraction. In this connection, I might note that it came as a surprise to me as a young student to

realize that "the laws of science" are only human descriptions of certain aspects of reality and do not in any way "cause" or "govern" what is going on. Later on I was surprised by the realization that most scientific knowledge consists of relationships among measurable aspects of phenomena and leaves us quite in the dark about the special and specific nature of events that are going on "out there." Measurement by its nature involves the selecting out of a particular attribute of an object or event. While the information it yields can be enormously powerful, the knowledge it yields about the objects or phenomena that give rise to it will always be indirect and partial.

### *Tests Omit Much but Promote Justice*

If I were asked to sum up my opinion of the standardized tests with which I am familiar that have been designed to measure academic achievement, I would say that they measure some of the important outcomes of education in such a way that they enable teachers, students and others who make judgments about the abilities and capacities of students to make sounder judgments than would otherwise be possible.

The tests in all cases involve abilities to perform in some specific way, and in all but a few cases they involve cognitive abilities. In some cases, such as the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the abilities are developed over a young lifetime of experience, out of school as well as in school. In other cases the abilities depend for their development on the learning experiences afforded by schooling, sometimes spread out over a period of years, as in the case of mathematics, and sometimes concentrated in a single year or term, as in the case of chemistry or probability statistics.

The tests do not measure the attitudes, interests or values of students associated with these abilities. They have nothing to say about the moral or spiritual development of students, about their capacity to experience joy or compassion or about their ability to help, lead or get along with others.

The tests are limited in another important way. They do not



reveal what is unique or special about the abilities of a particular student, only how he compares with other students. If one student making a certain score has had every imaginable opportunity to develop the abilities measured by the test, and another student making the same score has had to cope with meager resources, the test is blind to this fact.

Finally, the tests suffer from something that afflicts all forms of measurement, namely error or inaccuracy of measurement. One can only conclude about the score of a student on an achievement test that his or her "true score" is likely to be within a certain range of that score.

With so much bad news about the limitations of achievement tests, what can possibly be the good news that makes them appear so worthwhile to me? I believe I can trace my good opinion of the tests I know best to three major considerations.

I am impressed first of all with the fact that the teachers who play a direct and major role in the design and development of College Board tests are able generally to agree on what students of their subjects should be expected to know and to do — regardless of the particular schools they attended and the teachers, methods and materials they encountered — and to express confidence that the tests do indeed measure whatever this knowledge and skill turns out to be.

Secondly, I have acquired a profound appreciation for the psychometric ideas and techniques that are brought to bear on the developmental process that each test undergoes, and also for the competence and conscientiousness of the many specialists who become involved in this process.

An important third consideration in my mind is the fact that the colleges and schools making use of College Board testing programs do so voluntarily. When criticisms of particular tests reach the point of suggesting that their use be curtailed or outlawed, and that is the consequence of taking such a step, I have yet to conclude that the situation without tests would work more justly and more effectively in the interests of all concerned than when tests are included in the mix.

### *Noxious Influence or Aid to Transitions?*

Not long ago I attended a session at a meeting of an educational association the topic of which was "Who Controls the School Curriculum?" Panelists had obviously been selected to provide a variety of answers to this question. Textbook publishers, state departments of education, classroom teachers, teachers' associations, major curriculum reform projects and teacher education colleges or programs were all cited with some degree of persuasiveness. "Standardized tests" were not ignored, but were identified as exerting a particularly noxious influence. The session made me think there were things that the speaker and those in the audience who nodded at his remarks knew that I did not know or understand as well, and possibly that I was aware of something relevant to the discussion that no speaker had mentioned.

Left out of the discussion, I felt, were certain realities about the educational arrangements in this country in the large. It is understandable that each teacher would crave as much freedom as possible to go about his or her teaching without external constraints and that the faculty of each school would also wish to set their own curriculum. But I feel that we need somehow to keep as open as possible the avenues through which students are able to move from school to school, school to college and college to college. It is making these transitions that I see the necessity for certain uniformities of curriculum and practice, however they come about, and the major usefulness of College Board tests, because they promote these uniformities.

We live in a time of accelerating change, and none of us engaged in one way or another in education can escape the fact and consequences of change. The same holds true for educational institutions, whether they be schools or colleges, or associations such as the College Board and testing agencies such as Educational Testing Service. In conveying my views of the measurable and immeasurable in education, I need to add that I see reasons and possibilities for new and better forms of measurement than now exist, increased

understanding of ways in which tests can be used effectively and increased understanding as well of the possible harm they can do.

Since I place value on the many important outcomes of education that are not subject to measurement, I am particularly concerned to know if College Board tests through their presence and use in any way frustrate these outcomes and to determine if possible what can be done to minimize this frustration.

### *THE HABITS OF THE RAT*

The odor's beyond sweet, but begins  
there, like skunk. A dead giveaway —  
rat in the walls,  
belly full of yellow pellets. We

nosed it in the stove — wedged  
between the immaculate outer wall  
and oven, this harbinger of evil  
and disease, opposite of robins,  
decay accelerated by a baking day.  
The hands and feet were familiar  
from tracks on pans. The tail  
told the species — least dragon.  
Brooding a treasure of tinfoil  
bits, pieces of potholder, one  
marble, and asbestos insulation  
kneaded like pillows, perfect.

Imagine: the rat wakes to bacon  
and eggs, gazes at the soft glow  
of a flame and speaks, as fabulous  
animals can: "What a warm house  
I've found for winter," rubbing  
the cat's-eye like an amulet.

JOHN J. RONAN



AMY MORTON



# Art Education in the Secondary School

*An a Posteriori Rationale*

CHARLES M. DORN

It is always tempting when conditions seem to threaten the arts in the schools to seek new and hopefully more convincing arguments in defense of their continued presence in the curriculum. Whether there is any really viable threat to art programs at present may be debatable; however, no one seriously doubts that declining school enrollments and escalating school costs have schoolmen generally in a mood to reassess all curricular priorities.

What makes arts educators the first to panic in any period of reassessment is the knowledge that the traditional academic curriculum of the "3 Rs" or the "academics" will not need to undergo such a reassessment as they are *ex cathedra* priorities which need no defense, or for that matter, any new rationales to justify their continued presence in the curriculum. At times of "reassessment" the arts in the school seem only a little less suspect than the rationales we create in their defense.

Fortunately in the visual arts we have never had a shortage of available rationales to employ when times get difficult. Since art was first introduced into U.S. schools in the 1840s, we have claimed that art would improve eye-hand coordination, creativity, and reading and math scores. We have also assured the public that art would acculturate the young, the old, the rich, the poor and the

handicapped; produce budding young artists, art critics and art historians; and improve the visual appearances of our buildings, playgrounds and toasters. Our lack then is not the availability of rationales, but rather in having ones which in the last analysis are really convincing.

My concern here is not to challenge appropriate kinds of rhetoric or formal argument *per se*, but rather to question whether the case for support of nondiscursive learnings is best achieved through discursive means. Rest assured, I have nothing but good feelings about my colleagues for the literary arguments they invent. These include such notions as "art as a fourth R," "art as basic education" or art as "right hemisphere learning." All are essentially reasonable rationales that we can professionally endorse, but which may only convince the already convinced.

If we, in addition, consider the schools' current acceptance of what may be called a logical empiricist philosophy, there is even less of a chance that a case can ever be made for the arts in the secondary school. The philosophy of logical empiricism, which has inspired such notions as "management by objectives" and "program budgeting" in the school, would view most artistic goals as not even being appropriate to pursue in the schools. To the rational empiricist, "ethical, moral, religious, and aesthetic decisions are empirically unverifiable and therefore meaningless."<sup>1</sup>

I would not contend that all those responsible for school programs hold such a limited view of education. We do know, however, when the crunch comes, as it may well do in some of our larger urban and suburban school districts, that it will be the computer and the accountability system which makes the final choice regarding what subjects will be preserved. Need I remind anyone that there are no norm-referenced tests, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), in the arts. When push comes to shove, there will be no declining art SAT's to move a school's trustees and parents in a call to arms. Under such conditions art would die without a whimper.

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<sup>1</sup> George Kneller, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964), p. 7.

Lest I be misunderstood, I should again state my concern is not with the efficacy, lack of accuracy or even the possible relevance of suitable rationales, for in one way or the other most are defensible. I do even concede that we may now have empirically verifiable data which can support the notion that the arts do make a significant contribution to both the affective and cognitive development of students. My concern is not with the quality of the arguments which could be presented, but rather with the failure of such rhetoric to state the case for the arts in a really convincing way. More specifically, I feel it is time we talked less and showed more about what the arts are about in the secondary school.

What I am suggesting here is that the one case we too often fail to make for the arts in secondary education is one which could be based on the demonstrated effectiveness of the art programs themselves, i.e., *a posteriori* evidence. It is my contention that the strongest case that can be made for arts may be on its improving track record of successes both in meeting the needs of the schools and of the students.

As to some hard data in support of this view, I will refer briefly to two reports: (1) the Louis Harris Poll of 1973,<sup>2</sup> and (2) the National Center for Educational Statistics 1972-73 Summary of Public Secondary School Enrollments.<sup>3</sup> Harris' study concluded parents indeed valued arts training and arts education for their children in school, and the NCES study revealed that from 1960-61 to 1972-73, "Enrollments in art courses increased from 20.3 to 27.6 percent of total pupils . . . in absolute numbers these rises since 1960-61 are more striking with enrollments in art increasing from 2.4 million to 5.1 million."<sup>3</sup> Even if one is skeptical about the ultimate meaning of such studies, the Harris Poll and the NCES report do tend to support the notion that both those who pay and those who attend support arts programs in the schools.

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<sup>2</sup> National Research Center of the Arts Inc., *Americans and the Arts* (New York: ACA Publication, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Educational Statistics, *National Summary of Offerings and Enrollments in Public Secondary Schools 1972/73* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975).

Two activities I have recently engaged in which have given added reinforcement to the notion that art programs are truly effective in secondary schools are my involvement as chief reader for the College Entrance Examination Board's program in Advanced Placement in Studio Art and my current study of studio art programs in selected U.S. schools. In the AP program, I served as a member of a team of artists and educators who were responsible for evaluating the work of over 2,000 AP high school art students over a five-year period. As a result of this experience, it became readily apparent to me that our schools were lacking neither in talented students nor talented teachers. Though this experience with students from 100 or more AP high schools was not the same as looking at all 17,000-18,000 U.S. high schools, my feeling was that these AP schools might be more similar to the typical secondary school than one might suspect.

This experience prompted me in the fall of 1978 to begin a study of some 20 U.S. secondary art programs from coast to coast. These visits, which thus far have included 17 schools in ten states, involved contacts with 17 high school principals, 70 art teachers and nearly 2,000 art students. While my investigation is not at this time even near complete, I think I can even now deduce that my original thesis of the *a posteriori* rationale is essentially correct. The art education programs are successful in these schools, and without question, the administrators, parents, teachers and kids involved have no serious reservations about that fact.

While my study is far from complete, I think I have already found what may be some common elements which contribute to the development of quality secondary school studio art programs. Thus far I can note at least three conditions which seem to characterize such programs: (1) that the art program is a functional part of the overall curriculum of the school, (2) that the art program is geared to serve a broad range of needs and interests of the students and (3) that students are assured access to these programs. Though space will not permit a complete analysis of these observations, a word or two of explanation about each may be appropriate.



### *Art Has a Place in the School Curriculum*

While most school administrators do not care to be reminded of the student rebellions of the 1960s, most are willing to admit that the student cry for "relevance" in the '60s did have an effect in liberalizing the secondary school curriculum. The effect generally was to challenge the immutability of the Conant model of a 16-unit required curriculum, i.e., four years of English, history, math and science. What evolved was a reduced though still required "basic" curriculum, with a broad-based elective program which encourages students to elect courses in the arts and also in science, math, business and history. The new curriculum design permitted both a specialized education for the "egghead" and/or college bound and a broad-based education for students who wanted to sample a number of possibilities before settling on a lifelong career commitment. It was during this movement in the '60s that the secondary school found for the first time a meaningful place for the arts in the school curriculum. It was also during this period that art programs in U.S. schools received increased commitments in time, personnel and facilities.

In my visits with principals, I did not detect much enthusiasm for a return to the rigid 16-unit requirement of the '50s. This is in spite of the requirements now being made for minimum essentials tests for high school graduation in many states and cities. Principals generally liked the idea of a broad-based liberal education for secondary students and, if anything, felt students were "turned on" by the elective program, which they felt was the right course for the large majority of high school students yet to decide on a future career.

### *An Art Program Geared to Student Needs and Interests*

In all the schools visited, the studio curriculum was primarily shaped to meet the needs and interests of a broad variety of students. What was most encouraging about this approach, however, was that the instruction emphasized serious study and com-

mitment to whatever level or area the student chose to explore. I was indeed surprised by what I interpreted as a somewhat overall “squareness” and moralistic work-ethic tone to most of the programs visited. It would appear once a student chose the level and/or studio, i.e., drawing, painting, ceramics, etc., they were informed of what they needed to know, moved through a series of activities geared to gaining that knowledge, and exited with what appeared to be a seemingly clear-cut understanding of exactly what was learned.

Unlike the fuzzy creativity model of “What would you like to do today” or “What’s in your head” mode of the ’60s, these programs seemed to be businesslike, skill oriented and conceptually based systems of visual instruction. Kids, teachers and even principals generally seemed to be well informed about what was being taught and what was being learned.

### *Access to Instruction*

Most people think art educators are not too aware in political matters, but this is not true in these high schools. Access to art classes was a key consideration in all these programs, perhaps even to a fault. Teaching staffs would adjust schedules so that for the most part any student at any grade level could take almost any studio course at almost any hour of the day. This did mean in some cases teachers giving up preparation periods, accepting independent study, having classes incorporating five different grade levels or up to five or more levels of instruction going on at the same time.

Some examples I might cite are an Ohio school, where classes included students from grades 8 through 12 in the same class, and a Missouri school, in which a teacher in a studio area would teach up to five different levels in one class, i.e., a 6-week intensive, 18-week specialized, and second, third, and fourth year advanced students. In the view of a Missouri faculty, the advantage of such an approach was that eight art staff were employed in a 1,700-student school, and over 70 percent of all graduating students had at least one art class before graduation.

There is, of course, no way that such a brief article could hope to make a really persuasive case for art rationale, *a posteriori*, though I hope I have at least raised the possibility in some minds that what the arts may be achieving in secondary education can be as useful a support tool as any new rhetoric or sloganism we may invent. I recognize also that a case based on "inherent goodness," which has to depend upon what goes on in schools including evidence of good teaching, good learning and good art, is not as transportable as a literary treatise or a bumper sticker, but it can be done. A case in point is the *Review*, which publishes examples of student art that punch home the high artistic quality of the visual arts program at Andover. Corny or not, and in spite of inflation, a picture, unlike the dollar, may still be *worth* more than a thousand words.



LISA VODRA

## SCUBA DIVING

I wonder on what shore  
of the world's ocean  
I shall leave  
my life support apparatus.  
Demeter has almost destroyed me  
with my gnawed shoulder and my marred eyes.  
Can Neptune be more of a threat?

*Hold my wet suit,  
Mummie. A baby flounder  
scarcely two inches long  
swam beside me, and a crab  
walked over my hand.  
I could feel his feet  
through my glove.  
Come down  
with me, Mummie. You  
can breathe through my apparatus  
if you can't manage your own.*

Son,  
Once I breathed for you,  
circulated your blood.  
And I said, Use  
my apparatus a little while longer.  
Soon  
you will see wonders.

IRENE ORGEL



# An Alphabet for the Arts

*The Essentials of Artistic Literacy*

KATHERINE HERZOG

In the early 1960's the art teacher, and anyone else who was interested in secondary education with his wits about him, had a crusade on his hands. It is always a great thing to have an evidently righteous cause, and in many ways they were lucky. It was obvious that art was neglected in the school curriculum, that the academic fare was extraordinarily one sided and that something needed to be done. Something was done, but possibly the speed with which major changes took place has rushed us into extremes where again, though in a somewhat different manner, the arts are separated from the mainstream of the school curriculum. Perhaps we have to take a closer look at our present situation.

In 1960 the curriculum of the four high school years was heavily biased towards languages of various kinds: the language of foreign countries, of mathematics, of the humanities and so forth. There was almost no aesthetic education whatever; art courses offered to the younger classes were perfunctory, and older students were discouraged from spending any time at all on such frivolity as painting, dancing or acting. Gradually this was changed. Schools responded to the situation in various ways, but during the last fourteen or fifteen years most schools began to offer, and many to require, full credit courses in many of the arts. The "menu" varies

from school to school, so do the facilities and the administrative arrangements, but the status of the arts within the schools has changed significantly, and few students now graduate from our schools without having had some substantial exposure to the arts.

Had a real change of heart taken place? I don't think so. The advisers still regarded arts courses as frosting on the cake. They advised students, especially boys, to "bury" their arts courses as far as they could under a pile of math, science and history. They did not take the grade in an art course seriously, and success in the arts by no means set off weakness in some other academic area, as success in math or French might have done. Much of this is still true in 1979; art courses are still frequently referred to as "a change of pace," a "breathing space in the academic day," as if they were not quite a part of real education but were some kind of easement.

Some of the attitudes which regard the arts as second-rate citizens in the school curriculum were legacies from the distant past, some were built up in response to the way art was taught in the sixties and some are inherent in the nature of learning to work in the arts. The legacy from the past, often the distant nineteenth century past of many of our institutions, is really only a shadow, but it is still very perceptible in the way some of our colleagues and some of the parents of our students value certain subjects more than others. In the Rugby of Dr. Arnold the cleverest boys studied the Classics, and then in descending order there were modern and scientific streams. A boy who is brilliant at Latin is still thought of as clearly a strong student. Similarly French is more prestigious than Spanish. Physics is more demanding than biology. These are all myths; you never find anyone who admits to believing in them, but they are still lying around our faculty rooms and our parent conferences in a shadowy way; and in the myth the arts have no place in the schools at all.

The serious interests of the arts in secondary education were not helped by the fantastic experiments and wild boundaries of the sixties. Art, especially studio art, feeling its way as a full subject in the schools, tried out some exotic notions. I know of one class

where the students were asked to write their most private dream or wish on a piece of paper, burn the paper in a dish and then make a picture on newsprint using the dream ashes as their medium. It is not surprising that this kind of thing, and many other more serious, but yet puzzling, experiments were mocked and misunderstood by teachers who had spent their lives grinding irregular verbs into the heads of the young. The art teachers were experimenting with a classroom experience which was not product oriented and that was a very hot issue from 1968 to 1977, and we are not quite sure of our responses yet. The faculty at large, the parents and the administration want the studios to produce pictures of recognizable objects, preferably large and brightly colored, which can adorn the walls of our corridors. In the same way there is an expectation that the drama course will produce plays which can be enjoyed by the whole school and that the music department will prepare concerts for the Christmas season and other festivities. In some ways we have accepted the idea that what students are really learning in our classrooms is a process; they are not apprentices turning out supervised "masterpieces" so as to be accepted into the trade. The day of the prize essay, the Latin oration and the science competition is almost over; we know that students will probably forget the content of their science and history courses, but we hope, and expect, that they will retain the method and the means by which they can gain fresh knowledge for themselves. The same principles are even more obvious in the arts, though they are often forgotten. The aim of a drawing lesson is not to produce beautiful drawings but to teach people to draw. The arts require a long and rigorous apprenticeship before anything of quality can be done, but the fact that they must then be focused on the process and not the product often holds them back from full recognition in the schools.

We should probably spend more time in our faculty meetings and around the coffee urn trying to articulate our ideas about what we are teaching and trying to tell our colleagues something about our aims in teaching the arts. It is so easy to see a student standing in the sun with his camera, or bending over a potter's wheel with

a pot growing up between his hands, and to think, "Well, at least he's having a good time!" though we would seldom think in just those terms as we edge past a student in the library as he bends over his copy of Virgil. There is nothing wrong with having a good time, but the phrase is damaging when it is equated with "education for leisure," "filling spare time creatively" and so forth. Of course, the aim of the arts in education, as elsewhere, is to create something, but there is a tough ABC that has to be learned before anything worth having can be created, and it is that alphabet we are trying to teach. It is as enjoyable to learn that as it is to learn French grammar or trigonometry, but not necessarily any more so. We ought to talk about our ABC at least as often as the scientists talk about the need for understanding scientific method or the mathematicians talk about learning the language of the computer.

The "A" of the arts is, I take it, Attention and Activity. This Activity is the part of learning in the arts which most sharply differentiates the arts classroom from the classrooms of most other school subjects. In the studio and in the photo lab the students are standing up, walking around and so forth; in the dance studio and in the theater workshop they are using their bodies in somewhat the same way as that in which they use their textbooks in other subjects. The kind of Attention, too, that is required in the arts is not the attention to the teacher, the book or the experiment required in many other classrooms; it is the attention to self, the scrupulous noting of something within which every arts student has to develop if he is to bring his experience forth in terms of paint, dance or music. This kind of activity and this kind of attention differ very much from attention to the teacher and activity limited to desk work which is the staple fare of the academic day. Now there is a greater diversity of methods in our classrooms than there used to be, and there is, or there ought to be, a continuum of giving and receiving, of inward and of outward attention as the student moves through the day from one class to the next. In most students' lives, however, there is still a great preponderance of "taking in" and a dearth of "giving out" energy and initiative in the classroom. The arts which are rich in student-generated activity



have a crucial role in sustaining a balanced diet of giving and receiving.

The "B" of the arts is the Becoming and Being which are always involved in making anything. The paper, which is blank at the start of a period, becomes a picture in due course, the lump of clay becomes a pot and the pad of paper a short story. There is nothing more exciting for any human being of any age than to realize that something exists in the world now which did not exist before he made it and which never could have existed without his agency. Nowhere else does the student have his uniqueness so honored. Only too often the responses required by our teachers are uniform; at least to the more immature student there seems to be a right and a wrong answer to everything. The wrong answers are all different, but the right ones are the same. But not in art. There even the youngest can see that there is no "right" painting, and, when all the pictures are leaned up against the wall, and their glorious differences revealed, each young painter gets the thrill of Being what he is and not anything else at all.

The "C" is Creating, of course, but it is also "Cooperating." Some parts of work in the arts come from a very solitary inward core, but other parts are always made by people joining their offerings to make a common product: a play, a dance performance, improvisational music or a movie. Everyone who works in a school knows that the team excitement of any such cooperative venture can produce more excitement and can generate more energy and output than almost anything else we do. There are not nearly enough opportunities to do things together in either adolescent or adult years, and on the whole our skill in working with others is lamentably imperfect. Probably we are moving in this last quarter of the twentieth century into a period in which competition will cease to be a virtue and aggressive self-aggrandizement will become a positive menace to an overcrowded world. We will have to educate for the much more complex techniques of cooperative activity; and it is exactly in this field that so many of the arts can offer liberal experience.

Attending, Becoming, Cooperating; Acting, Being and Creating.

If these are our aims and we keep them steadily before us and before our colleagues, parents and the administration, there can be no doubt in anybody's mind that the arts must take their place now as gravely as any other subject in the general curriculum. There have been very obvious gains during the last decade. Among buildings added to independent and public school campuses during the late sixties and early seventies, arts buildings of various kinds are certainly among the most important. There have been some beautiful and impressive developments providing almost professional spaces and equipment for the arts in many schools. Benefactors in the private sector have been intrigued by the possibilities inherent in building arts centers, theaters and studios. Most good schools now offer a wide choice of full credit courses in the arts, and many have very interesting arts programs, special arrangements for work in various fields, interdisciplinary courses and the like. Advanced work is possible in many schools, and, despite the pressure of diploma requirements, the talented student can often become very expert in a chosen art form. Colleges no longer look askance on the transcript that shows strength in the arts. Parents, coming to look at schools for their children, usually inspect the arts facilities and pay a good deal of attention to that whole aspect of school life. For that reason and others the arts have new prestige among the administrators, admissions people and fund raisers in the schools.

All this is good news. However, there is a warning in it too. The money from benefactors and fund drives that has gone towards arts buildings of various kinds has tended to separate the practice of art from the currents of life in the rest of the school, and in some ways we are no more integrated into the real core of the curriculum than we were when there were no proper art rooms at all. The separation runs deep: how many of us teach dramatic literature in the theater, history of art in the studio or indeed any kind of aesthetic theory in relation to artistic practice? In our efforts to honor the arts and to build homes for them, have we allowed a separation which should not exist? In our efforts to pioneer "hands on" courses in which students actually do and

make things, have we neglected the essentials of aesthetic literacy? I think these are the dangers of the years that lie ahead of us.

A separation of the arts from the academic curriculum is bad both for the artist and for the rest of the school. There should be a constant interplay between the arts and the sciences; teachers and students of both need to exchange ideas constantly. Schools need to see what is happening in the arts and to be jogged, reminded and even shocked as often as possible. Teachers need to be reminded that all sorts of creative things are going on in English classrooms, in science courses and in history; but also that all sorts of rigorous learning is required in the music room and the studio. An education which is made up of discrete fragments labeled "U.S. History," "Studio Art," "Nineteenth Century French Literature" and the like is not what we want. The arts must play at least as vital a part in the life of the school as they begin to do in our daily lives.

The problem of aesthetic literacy is really another aspect of the same danger. In our efforts to engage the hands and hearts of students whom we felt were getting too exclusive a diet of head work, we may have gone too far in separating theory from practice. We have put theory and practice in different buildings, scheduled them for different times of day, taught them in different styles offered by instructors who may not even meet each other in the dining hall. We teach students how to paint in oils on Tuesdays and Thursdays in their studio art course; and on Mondays and Fridays we teach them what various great men have done in the same medium in the history of art course. In our lives, however, we must both paint and look, both dance and go to watch the ballet, both make music and listen to music.

The tendency to contain and separate is deeply embedded in our schools. We are governed by bells, "subjects," room numbers, requirements and the other devices of the educational system. Efforts to break down the single cells by means of practices such as the integrated day or the open classroom in the late sixties and early seventies seemed to create almost as many problems as they solved. But the responsibility to educate whole people must be faced, and in trying to face it teachers and others who are specially concerned

with the arts in education should probably take a formative role. The task will include educating our colleagues into a real understanding of our aims, articulating those aims with more traditional academic objectives and formulating practices in schools which will work towards wholeness. Perhaps our new crusade should be to teach the ABC of the arts to everyone alike.

### VOCATION

I wanted to be a surgeon but  
 when I put a scapel near someone's heart  
 it might come out between the back ribs  
 for instance because I have faulty  
 depth perception they said how did I feel  
 about Public Health Okay I said picturing  
 the gray building not wanting to hurt them  
 They tested me for manual dexterity and  
 ideophoria said I'd make a terrific

window decorator I went home decorated  
 my window with little white paper cutout  
 stars and moons on the black panes Looks  
 really nice my mother said They asked me  
 to write on what would happen if the sun  
 didn't shine and I wrote more words than  
 anyone ever they said that's a record  
 I said what's it good for they said  
 we don't know but you're young yet

NINA NYHART



# Reviews

*The Literacy Hoax*, by Paul Copperman  
(New York: William Morrow and Company,  
Inc., 1978)

Reviewed by WILLIAM H. BROWN

## A Call for the Return to Basics and Authority

Anyone who is concerned with the decline in scholastic performance of students in secondary schools, and who is not, should read Paul Copperman's *The Literacy Hoax*. I am not sure that the reader will come away convinced by the argument, but he will come away massively informed and will be able to take a stand one way or another on the back-to-basics issue. Copperman's argument is that, measured by Scholastic Aptitude Tests and every other measurement except grades received in school, the aptitude of students after reaching a post-Sputnik high in 1963 has steadily and precipitously declined through 1977: from 502 to 470 mathematical, from 478 to 429 verbal, this on a scale 200 to 800. Over this same period school curricula and teaching have undergone significant change. The decline in aptitude and skills must therefore be the result of change and innovation. We must, if we wish to reverse the trend, return to the pre-1963 rigorous training in reading, writing and computation. Copperman points to two kinds of literacy. The first is functional literacy, which will allow an individual to apply these skills in securing and maintaining employment and meeting the obligations of citizenship. These basic skills, within the reach of almost all students, are the foundation for the second, higher literacy, by which the individual through history,

literature, science and mathematics is enabled to make sense out of the world in which he lives. Functional literacy is the primary function of our schools; higher literacy is the second function. What is of interest to this issue of *The Review* is that nowhere does teaching in art receive any attention. There is, however, a brief mention of the need for moral education, an integral part of the country's first 185 years of education. Copperman sees as a function of secondary school principals, second only to basic skills, the overseeing of something called "values education."

The book is divided into four chapters. In the first, "Literacy Decline," Copperman points out that the decline in aptitude scores is all the more alarming when we note that during the 1963 to 1977 period there is a gain in both reading and mathematical computation up to the third grade and a mounting decline from the fourth grade on up, which would seem to point to the fact that we are doing something wrong in our schools. What we have done wrong in the elementary schools is to adopt a policy of psychological goals of developing self-esteem, enthusiasm for life and learning and independent judgment. The new cognitive goals have become creativity, intellectual open-mindedness and mastery of concepts underlying traditional subject matter at the expense of teaching young children reading, writing, computing, citizenship and basic subject matter. Encouraging the child to think for himself and set his own goals has resulted in depriving him of enough teaching. Lovely as the goals of the new curriculum may be, in Copperman's view they have sacrificed too much teacher direction, teacher input and teacher discipline. Copperman is given to definitive statements such as "In the domain of academic achievement children tend to learn what they are taught. Conversely, in the same domain, children tend not to learn what they are not taught. Preschool and primary-grade children are learning more today because they are taught more. Intermediate, secondary and college students are learning less today because they are being taught less." The authority of the teacher is so important to him that he devotes a later chapter to it.

The second chapter, "From Miss Grundy to Johnny Carson,"

outlines the practices which have led to the decline. They are individualized beginning reading instruction, the new math, open education, formal systems of individualized instruction in the elementary schools. His criticism of the new math is that it asks the child to conceptualize a skill before the skill itself is mastered and before the child has reached the conceptual level demanded, citing Piaget. However, his main objections are that these methods have been introduced before they have been properly evaluated and that they seriously reduce the authority and therefore the effectiveness of the teacher.

When Copperman comes to the junior and senior high school, he says, "After two years of investigation I am convinced that the single most important factor in the massive fall off in academic skills is the deterioration of the secondary school curriculum." Some of what he says here is familiar. Students write less well because they are asked to write less and are not held to standards. They read less well because they read less and what they are asked to read has been simplified and is less demanding. They compute less well because they are allowed to avoid demanding courses and are again held to a diminished standard. The culprits here are a mistaken egalitarianism stemming from the late '60s and an equally mistaken freedom given students to choose courses and teachers. "The key to effective education," he says, "is a combination of high academic standards and heavy work demands imposed by the teacher on his students. The teacher must have parental, community and administrative support in order to make his demands and standards stick, and in order to handle the resistance of his students to hard work." He sees the curriculum as fragmented as is the school day, which leaves open periods, an invitation to idleness and violence. He sees half school days and work on part-time jobs for the other half as damaging to the education of the middle-range and above-average students. He points to grade inflation as the basis of the hoax perpetrated on the student, giving him more and more for less and less, leading him to think that he is equipped to survive when he is not. He condemns compensatory education as introducing confusion to those who can least afford to bear it, as

putting educational authority in other hands than those of the teacher and as imposing federal and state control on local education. The "disadvantaged student" would benefit far more from a sound grounding in basic skills and a mastery of standard language.

As one might expect, Chapter Three, "Authority," is a clear call for turning around the effects of the permissive family and an affluent society which give the student an opportunity to exploit the weaknesses of both. The result has been student control over courses and teachers and a resultant lowering of standards. He points to the dangers of keeping students in schools where they do not wish to learn. Schools become expensive baby-sitting institutions. He also points to widespread drug and alcohol abuse, violence in and out of schools, gains in power by younger teachers who share with students a dislike of hard and basic work to the discouragement of older teachers who would assert authority and maintain discipline. "The most valuable legacy we have in America is our liberty. The most powerful force protecting this liberty is the strength of the authority inherent in our various political, social and economic institutions."

In the last chapter, "Educational Leadership," Copperman makes explicit the remedies to this desperate situation implicit in the criticism. Copperman does better in his own words than in any summary.

The problem:

Our problem is a nationwide deterioration in basic academic skills and knowledge. Students do not read, write or compute as well as they did ten years ago. Nor do they know as much about history, science or literature. The deterioration starts at about fourth grade and worsens steadily throughout junior and senior high school. The decline in academic skills is not restricted to poor, inner-city or minority students. Middle or upper socioeconomic status does not protect a student against the decline. Nor is the deterioration restricted to average or below-average students. Above-average and even exceptional intelligence is not protecting students against the decline. . . .



Our educational system is a sick 130-billion-dollar-a-year social institution. The achievement decline, the curricular degeneration, the grade inflation, the literacy hoax — these are symptoms of educational decay. Because our public schools are such an important socializing force in the lives of America's young people, their continued deterioration is extremely dangerous for our society, and enormously damaging to our children.

The solution:

The first step in the solution of our educational problem is a societal reaffirmation of traditional educational goals and the necessity for strong educational authority. If I read their mood correctly, the great majority of the American people still believe quite strongly in the traditional educational goals outlined in the introduction — the overriding importance of teaching all American children the primary academic skills, reading, writing and computing, and the enormous individual and social value inherent in instruction in math, science, history and literature. Unfortunately, there is not the same degree of public recognition of the necessity of strong educational authority. Herein lies the great educational dilemma of our time. A social institution, like an individual, cannot fulfill its responsibilities unless it is given sufficient authority. The American people must realize that the public schools will not be able to fulfill their traditional purpose unless they are given a great deal of authority and autonomy.

The solution lies in teachers of authority backed by the leadership of principals, superintendents and school boards. The teacher has three functions. First, a teacher must have his class under control. He must have the character and skill to get students to do what he wants them to do when he wants them to do it when they are in class. So much for student freedom. Second, he has the responsibility to assign meaningful tasks in a meaningful curriculum (by which is meant core curriculum). Through the curriculum the student should master an essential body of skills and knowledge to survive and function in the world.

Lest I make Copperman out to be a red-necked reactionary, I will quote him on the third function:

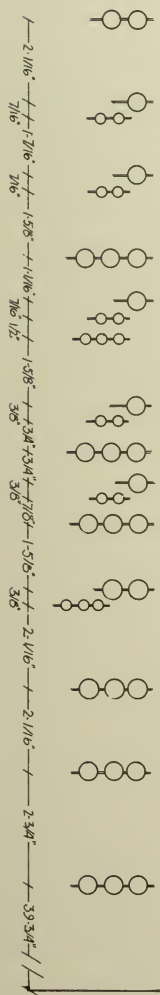
The modern American curriculum legitimately assigns its teachers a third basic function, one which I endorse, but which must always be subordinate to the first two. Teachers should primarily use positive forms of motivation with their students. Classrooms should be lively, happy places. Students' art work should fill the walls. Teachers must not be punitive or abusive; they must be firm, direct, and in control, but they should also like and love children, and respond to them with praise and other expressions of positive emotion. . . .

This is a powerful and unequivocal book. I have done my best to summarize the argument and have been strongly affected by it. After many years of teaching, I believe in standards stoutly maintained, I believe in the mastery of skills and I believe in the validity and the authority of my profession. However, I also believe in self-esteem, enthusiasm for learning, independent judgment, creativity and open-mindedness and cannot dismiss them as "lovely" impedimenta to teacher authority. Over the years I have come to suspect simple cause and effect: scores have gone down, we have introduced these changes in education; therefore, the changes are responsible for the decline. There are too many variables in both cause and effect.

There is, however, a second part to the book entitled "Interviews from the Front." This section consists of taped interviews taken down in California high schools of all sorts during the academic year 1975-1976, interviews with students, teachers, administrators and evaluators. Copperman does not choose metaphors lightly; these are words from embattled people. Making allowances for selectivity and editing, I find myself convinced of the desperateness of the overall situation and the need to act.

*The Illusion of Technique*, by William Barrett  
(New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978)  
Reviewed by ROBERT A. LLOYD

"The statement is a *picture* of the fact."  
(Wittgenstein)



To your left are the data: an arrangement of nails driven into the doorpost of a barn in central New Hampshire. Sets of nails—or sometimes a single nail—their heads centered on horizontal scratches in the pine, are occasionally offset. When the scratches are close, smallheaded nails have been used, but most of them are galvanized shingle nails, tarnished with time.

One might guess, accurately, that this is a record of growth. In a ritual each summer my two sisters and I, in order of age, stood backs pressed to the post, and my father transferred our heights with a ruler, scratched with a nail, and drove nails along the mark to show which mark belonged to each child. All could see how much each of us had grown in a year. I remember the emotion I felt at each demonstration: if I had grown so much, how much more of a person I must be! How much richer my feelings, more mature my thought! All in the family could see that this was true at last. The nailheads were more than sign, they were symbol: all was well with me, *all*, and the truth I felt found public affirmation. The future was assured.

Can one imagine an intelligent technologist reconstructing the value of my year's growth from these data? I hope not. Yet, in the tech-

nology of education, when we nail down decisions about students' or teachers' futures on the basis of transcripts, test scores or quantified evaluations and thereby feel thorough and conscientious, we experience what Barrett calls "the illusion of technique." Partly we assume that we know more than we do, partly we assume that our knowledge is more important than it really is. Barrett's suspicions are nostalgic at times, but I question with him the prevailing assumption that quantitative evaluation can be substituted for holistic judgment.

Barrett's book recounts how questions have been raised about this and other assumptions, traces recent discussions of the problems created by the questions and attempts a resolution. Focusing on the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger and William James, he brings to life a discussion among the three, each in his strength filling in the weaknesses of the others. Barrett weaves a complex net of thought, a context in which critically to perceive the shape of the future, for which he briefly hypothesizes an American and a Russian version. The two versions differ in their assumptions about the importance of individual freedom but are fatefully bound together in their commitment to technology. The book is concerned with our increasing reliance on technique and an accompanying growth of purely technological perceptions of the human condition; Barrett argues skillfully and convincingly that they may be necessary but are not sufficient to our survival.

In keeping with his theme, he deemphasizes the technical gyrations of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, using James' uncommonly common sense as a sea anchor late in the book. The arguments leave a teacher's mind full of echoes, many of them curiously vibrant in such technical areas as declining test scores, accountability, litigiousness, evaluation, behaviorism, competency, academic standards, interest-group lobbying and the extraordinary belief that our technological professions can and must provide everyone equally with happiness, comfort, intelligence, effectiveness, justice and perfect physical health (see "The Pre-Professionals," *The Andover Review*, Fall 1978). For those whose teaching or educational concerns have been deflected by the pervasive growth of educational technology, I



recommend this book as a provoking guide toward a critical reaction.

Three questions mingle and separate throughout: how shall we perceive being — our being in relationship to all being? can we assume that we have creative freedom, and if so, how shall we exercise it? and if we see, now, that our knowing has inherent limits beyond which important realms of meaning exist, can we afford to ignore the fact, or should we incorporate this perception in our knowing — and our teaching? Barrett is a philosopher, and his discourse is not directly concerned with education, yet teachers live largely in the shadow of these questions, particularly teachers of a “creative” process.

How shall we perceive being? Will our carefully amassed technological modes of perception, increasing geometrically in quantity, be adequate — not only to a hypothetical intellect which might understand them all, but to our collective survival? Or, in its fragmentation and disarray, has technology left us without “the kind of thinking that would redeem ourselves from the world we ourselves have created?” “We may have made ourselves incapable of such thinking,” says Barrett. He offers a striking example: “One of the seductive promises of the axiomatizers was that we would eventually be able to carry on mathematics without having to understand what we were doing.” This reminds one of Skinner, who suggests that we can successfully teach without knowing what we are doing. Early in the century, Husserl raised a scandalized voice against the “mechanization” of mathematics and psychology. Since he wrote, things have become worse; “discoveries upon discoveries have piled up, but the unifying concepts seem lacking.” Cut off from our environment by the exercise of “putting nature on the rack” (as Bacon described science), we have suffered a loss of “cosmic consciousness.” “Nature is in tatters,” remarks Whitehead. Heidegger’s gentle — and powerful — musings about how to see Being are perhaps too gentle (“In Heidegger there is no notion of our self-surrender in *doing*”), but they begin to describe some of the necessary aspects of our accurate perception of nature: “Freedom is the condition of truth itself, for unless we are free to *let be*,

to let things show themselves as what they are, we will only force our willful distortions on them." Good advice for a teacher, whose business is changing people.

The second theme Barrett treats is that of freedom. Is the determinists' view, implicit in a behavioristic approach to teaching and learning, adequate to the truth? "What determinism asserts is that given the totality of all antecedent conditions in the universe that lead to the present occasion (in which we are to choose or act), one and only one future can follow." In rebuttal, Barrett introduces James (from an earlier Harvard) and his disciplined optimism. A personal crisis, mentioned only briefly in his writings, turned James to a concern for the sources of motivation and faith:

I think that yesterday was a crisis in my life. I . . . see no reason why his [Renouvier's] definition of free will — "the sustaining of thought *because I choose to* when I might have other thoughts" — need be the definition of an illusion. At any rate, I will assume for the present — until next year — that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will.

Against the circular, self-contained logic of the determinist James brings the circular, outward reaching "logic" of experience: we do act, often with freedom, not a total freedom, devoid of habit or memory, but still in the resistances of life we find new thoughts, new ways to act. One is reminded of Wittgenstein's conversion to an interest in ordinary language: "To deal exclusively with a formal logical language is like walking on ice. 'There is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!'" To read Wittgenstein is to experience surprising thoughts about the familiar; his is a history of a mind that changes, that repudiates the elegance of thoughts like his own quoted at the start of this article. It is no more credible to understand his thought as predictable than to understand a classroom full of young minds as predetermined. Neither is possible, much less desirable.

Barrett succeeds for me in mustering the troops necessary to de-

molish the determinist's position and relies for logistical support not on technological arguments but on his third theme, the recognition that to act freely requires a leap of faith. So much sounds familiar. What is special and especially difficult is to describe the object of this faith. Faith in what? Although Barrett himself hints at a personal faith of a religious kind, he is too careful to suggest anything uniform or readily defined. He labels this theme "mysticism," introducing it gently:

The task of philosophy in this situation becomes neither the meaningless rejection nor the equally meaningless affirmation of technology, but to try to see where technical and technological thinking, with no other principle but itself, must lead us; and whether some countervailing mode of thought may not be called for.

Direct references to this theme are noticeably fewer than to the others, but their intensity is far greater. As he came to know Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell was surprised: "He [Wittgenstein] has penetrated deep into mystical ways of thought and feeling, but I think (though he wouldn't agree) that what he likes best in mysticism is its power to make him stop thinking. . . ." Although Wittgenstein has been called the father of logical positivism, his thought was filled with mysterious currents which he recognized but did not explain. "The meaning of this world lies outside the world," he says. "*That* the world is, is mystical." Heidegger's contribution, his attempts to differentiate between an examination of the universe and a true perception of Being, carry with them at all times a mystical element. What is the ground of Being? It can only be confronted — or not; it cannot be described. It escapes definition, yet it is the luminous organizer of every particle of our most common experience. With the discussion of James, Barrett moves beyond Heidegger's "aesthetic" preoccupation with seeing and introduces the will, suggesting that our every action is integrally involved with and dependent on the assumption of this will — again, a mystical ground which can exist only in faith, "the faith to will" rather than James' "will to faith."

In *Walden II*, Skinner describes a managed society, but, as Barrett points out, unless we assume that at least the managers exercise free will there is no reason to assume that their choices will be better choices than those of the population and hence that they can be any more intelligent than us in the exercise of their devilish technology. Even Skinner has his mystical perceptions, though: for example, that we can never understand the internal working of an organism and must concentrate on its behavior. The interior is a “black box,” beyond comprehension. A greater mystery is Skinner’s optimism: he believes that all can be well even if we do not understand what we are doing to the withinness of things. Effective teachers proceed with similar optimism but at least try to understand. How not?

In selecting *The Illusion of Technique* to review for this issue, I was interested in what Barrett might contribute to our understanding of art and the ways in which an involvement in art reflects a concern with larger issues. I was not disappointed. It would be difficult to suggest three questions more relevant to art than how shall we see, how shall we believe in creative freedom and how shall we seek meaning beyond the specific things we do? Nor could one find three thinkers who better define the basic issues of art: the fastidious craftsmanship of the early Wittgenstein and his extraordinary, plunging involvement in the tangles of the ordinary; Heidegger’s urgings that we see what is there with a disciplined, quiet eye; and James’ conviction that we have the power freely to seek and create meaning. Each has central things to say to artists and creative students of art. And in so doing, they reaffirm the centrality of seeing and visual creativity to learning, especially as these activities venture beyond the limits of technology.

Yet in his treatment of the visual arts, Barrett disappoints. He starts bravely enough:

We do, of course, still use the word [technology] in other areas, as in the arts, which appear alien to technology. We commonly speak, for example, of a painter’s or a writer’s technique. We even give studio courses in these subjects. And if we enroll as students, we seek to learn to paint or to write, as the case may be. But

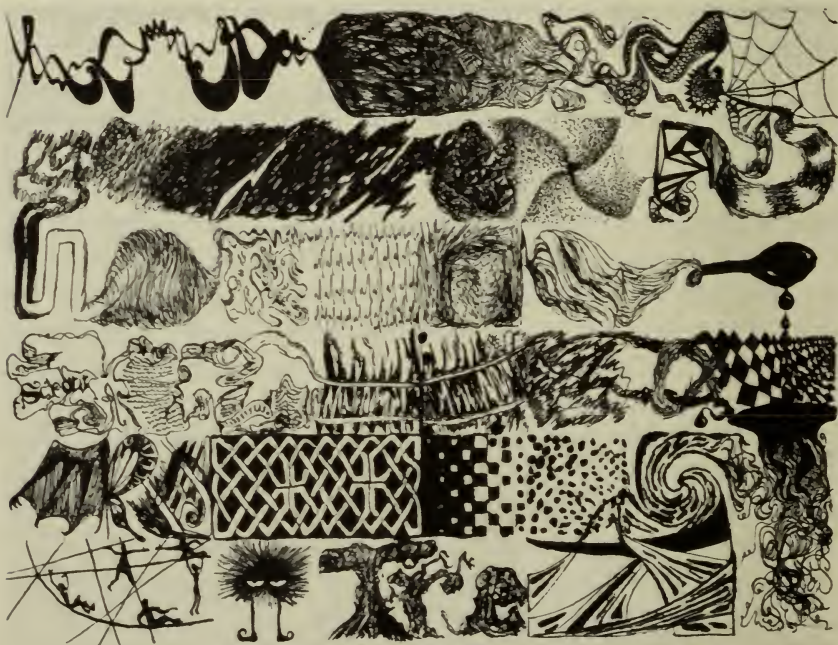


even here, and perhaps most of all here, if we watch how the various meanings grade off, we get a glimpse of the more precise and limited sense of technique. The teacher may give us certain quite simple and mechanical rules to get started. But if the pupil persists and develops, he eventually reaches a point where the teacher has to tell him he is on his own, and there is no prescribed technique that will paint his picture for him. Then other words have to be invoked — a special knack, a gift, flair, talent, or, most remote of all, genius. Indeed, it was a simple consideration like this that led Kant to define genius as the ability to produce something over and above any rules. Genuine creation is precisely that for which we can give no prescribed technique or recipe; and technique reaches its limits precisely at that point beyond which real creativity is called for — in the sciences as well as the arts.

Heidegger refers to mathematics as “that which can be taught.” How can we teach *beyond* what can be taught? Paradoxically, we do this all the time, from the beginning. Barrett proposes his “faith to will” as a motive sufficient to carry us through our technological morass. Curious to me is the haste with which he discards the visual arts as relevant. After this initial reference, over and over he accuses contemporary art as having become peripheral, disconnected from meaning, impoverished — bespeaking an impoverishment of the contemporary soul. In *Irrational Man*, he gave artists their due, matching the century from Manet to Matisse in its abundance to the fifteenth century. Since he wrote that book, he seems to have suffered a disenchantment. Critical of the art of the sixties and seventies, it is clear that he does not seek support for his faith in that direction. Too bad, I say, and wonder what he has seen. Perhaps his eyes are tired.

Seeing remains the central issue, after all, even as Barrett seeks solace in the rocks and trees of the Hudson Valley, the flux of nature and the sanctuary of his garret. His are aesthetic pleasures of the eye. Can we see what we have done to ourselves and to our world? If we find ways to combine technological skills with critical, holistic judgments, we shall have to *see* those ways. As the visual arts bring these two divergent and sometimes contradictory

capacities together, they guide us through thickets dense with wordy thought. Speaking against technical philosophy, Barrett quotes a Taoist: "The truth is your ordinary mind." The truth of our creative survival is our ordinary living, which must mix new with old, technique with purpose, experiment with judgment, thinking with seeing. As it embodies these syntheses, art is a part of our ordinary lives, central to our growth. As it inevitably touches and reflects us as individuals, art seems peculiarly appropriate to Barrett's faith in the power of individual choice. The more we look, the more we see. I am left wondering why he wanders from this truth, and am tempted to quote Wittgenstein and Husserl: "Don't think, look!" "To the things themselves!" In art we always head for the rough ground.



LISA VODRA

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## ARTICLES

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RON OVERTON — poet, jazz enthusiast, hockey fan, photographer — lives in Lake Grove, Long Island and has worked as a New York Poet in the Schools since 1970. A book of his poetry will be published in Street Press in the Spring.

A poet, CHARLES W. PRATT teaches English at Phillips Exeter Academy.

Since 1975 JOHN VALENTINE has been Professional Associate for Academic Affairs for the College Entrance Examination Board. The focus of this position is on building wider and stronger relations between the College Board and the teaching community.

## GRAPHICS

A senior at Westside Senior High School in Omaha, Nebraska, MARCIA BEDWELL attended a Short Term Institute in Visual Studies at Phillips Academy this winter.

MARK LORAH is in the eleventh grade at Concord-Carlisle High School.

A senior at Phillips Academy, AMY MORTON spent two months this winter on an off-campus project, studying art.

A previous contributor to *The Review*, GREG MOTEN graduates from Phillips Academy this spring. His home is in Newark, New Jersey.

JOHN OLCAY attends Phillips Academy from New York City.

JENNIFER REILLY attends Lawrence Academy, in Groton, Massachusetts, where she participates in the Lawrence II program.

DAN WHEELER is a senior at Phillips Academy. He lives in Dedham, Massachusetts.

Attending Phillips Academy from Wooster, Ohio, LISA VODRA is in the eleventh grade.

## POEMS

JANE BARNES is a founder and editor of *Dark Horse*. She is working on the third draft of her second novel. Poems included in this issue under the heading of *Inventions* have appeared in *Dark Horse* and *Gargoyle*.

THEODORE HALL is presently freelancing in the New Haven area and working on poems, songs and drama. His work, critical and creative, has appeared in such places as *New York Quarterly*, *Shenandoah*, *Maps*, *Boston University Journal* and *Granite*.

NINA NYHART's first collection of poems, *Openers*, was recently published by Alice James Books. She is co-author, with Kinereth Gensler, of *The Poetry Connection: An Anthology of Contemporary Poems with Ideas to Stimulate Children's Writing* (Teachers & Writers, N.Y., 1978). She lives in Brookline, Ma., and teaches poetry writing to teachers.

IRENE ORGEL is currently poet-in-the-schools in Kentucky. In the spring of 1976 she conducted the poetry part of the Poetry/Photography workshop at the Short Term Institute at Andover. Ms. Orgel is the author of a book of short stories, *The Odd Tales of Irene Orgel* (Eakins, N.Y., 1967), and of an as-yet-unpublished collection of poems, *Naturalization Papers*, from which "Scuba Diving" is taken.

JOHN RONAN, originally from Chicago, now lives in Gloucester, Ma. His work has appeared in *New York Quarterly*, *Yankee*, *Ohio Review* and other publications.

JUDITH W. STEINBERG has a book of poems for children: *Marshmallow Worlds*. Her poems have appeared in *Dark Horse*, *The Smith*, *13th Moon*, *Black Maria*, and in *Ourselves and Our Children*. She currently has a three-year grant as Poet-in-Residence in the Hamilton-Wenham public schools and teaches on the summer school faculty at Tufts University.



